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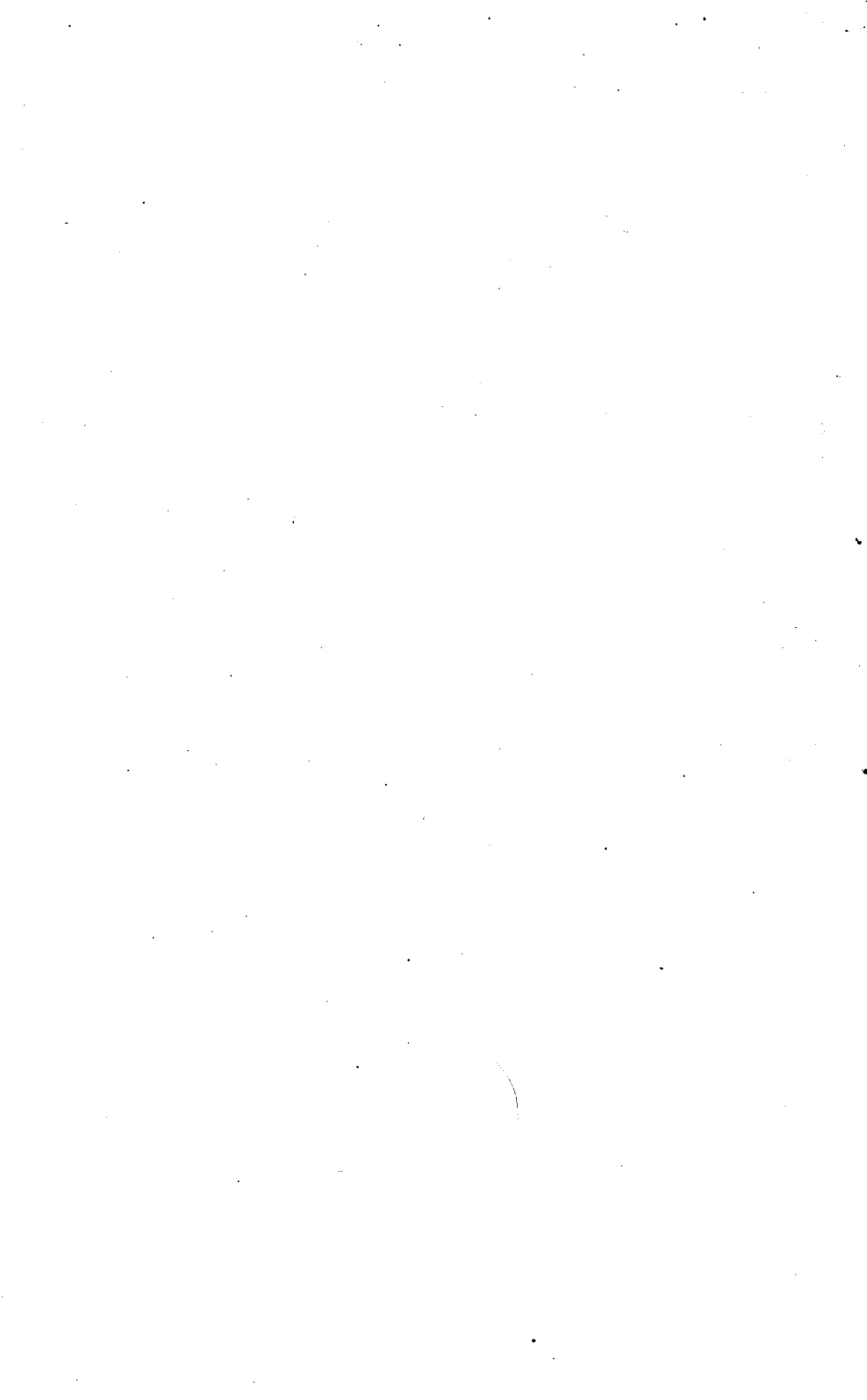
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# The Evening Standard

## SECOND BOOK OF STRANGE STORIES

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79 AUTHORS

84 STORIES

1024 PAGES



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G. B. STERN

*The Hazard of the Spanish Horses*



## THE HAZARD OF THE SPANISH HORSES

UNDOUBTEDLY Rudolf Beckendorf had had too much champagne that night at the Little Hot Dog. If he had not ordered that fifth bottle he would never have bet Count von Drasselburg that he would break into the stables of the Spanish horses and ride one of them to Ebeldorf, a village some ten miles from Vienna, and back. If he had not ordered that fifth bottle there would have been no bet and no story. As it is—well, at all events, the management of the Little Hot Dog benefited by some 300,000 kronen, of which at least 60 per cent must have been sheer profit.

The Spanish horses—some thirty splendid white Arabs, and one brown—are so called because they are trained and equipped in the Spanish manner. For on the model of the court of Spain the Austrian emperors founded much of their own stiff code of ceremonial. These horses were once the property of the Emperor of Austria, and were ridden only by members of the Imperial family.

You can see them in their stalls, if you pay 10,000 kronen ; lovely things, with coats of shining satin and soft black velvet muzzles. Their dark eyes still flash fire, and their fine-drawn legs remind you irresistibly of the tapering spars of a racing yacht leaning before the wind.

They are still one of the sights of Vienna ; and every morning they are cantered round the tan-covered floor of the riding-school of the Hofburg. There is something tragically futile about these horses, still in their royal stable, yet with never an Archduke to ride them ; tragic as all the symbols of

vanished pomp and majesty that still strew Vienna—once the chief city of an empire, now the bourgeois capital of a minor republic.

Rudolf Beckendorf, his twin brother Fritz, the Count von Drasselburg, and two or three of their friends who were sitting in a box at the Little Hot Dog, all semi-intoxicated, were also rather tragic survivals. A few years before, they had galloped behind the carriage of old Emperor Franz; or danced, magnificent in uniform of blue and silver, at the stately Imperial balls.

Now, when the Emperor was dead, the Empire torn to fragments, the army a shadow, the Hofburg tenanted by disdainful ghosts and shabby caretakers, they could find nothing better to do than to forget the splendours of the past for an hour or two, by the help of the widow Clicquot, and the entertainment provided at a cabaret. And they were all of them in that dangerous inflammable, discontented mood, which came of having nothing left to do, and no ideals to live for. It was a pity that such personable youngsters, showing in line and carriage a breeding no less distinguished than that of the Spanish horses, should be wasted on evenings of alternative quarrelling and maudlin recollection.

The Beckendorf twins, in particular, were a handsome pair, uncannily like each other except in expression, for Fritz was dreamy where Rudolf was reckless. Whenever they looked at Von Drasselburg, however, you had not even that slight help in telling them apart, for then their faces were stamped equally with haughty dislike; Albrecht Von Drasselburg was a braggart who did not perform.

"Do you remember, Rudolf," said his brother, "when you jumped on and off the mess table one Christmas night, on that chestnut marc of yours?"

"Pooh! Beckendorf couldn't jump a hurdle," sneered Von Drasselburg. "He rides like a Prussian."

"If I ride like a Prussian, you ride like a Polish tailor," Rudolf snarled in reply. "You won't find a horse in all Vienna that I can't ride."

"I know of thirty-one horses you daren't ride!"

"I'll ride any and all of them up and down this staircase, yes, and jump them into a box from the dancing-floor!"

"I'll bet you fifty million to ten you won't break into the Spanish stables, saddle one of the horses, and ride him to Ebeldorf and back."

"Done, and to-night!" cried Rudolf, shaking off his brother's restraining hand.

Fritz flushed a hot scarlet. Less drunk than the others, he could not bear the idea that Rudolf might make a fool of himself in Von Drasselburg's eyes. But to steal one of the Spanish horses—it was a mad undertaking. He tried, too late, to treat the whole bet as a joke.

But Von Drasselburg merely wiped him out with a cold glance. "It will not take me longer than twenty minutes to drive down to the Rother Adler, in Rapaport's car; we will expect you there at four o'clock, Beckendorf. Laslov, will you remain in Vienna, outside the Hofburg, to time the hour of his return? Don't trouble to dismount, Rudolf, just tap with your crop—I will put cotton-wool in my ears and save myself fifty million! Ha! ha!"

His two supporters, Rapaport and Laslov, roared with laughter. They were lubricated at all times after 11 p.m. to laugh easily. Rudolf scowled, and demanded fiercely whether his opponent doubted his honour.

Von Drasselburg's high forehead seemed to grow yet higher and more polished with annoyance: "I said nothing about your honour."

"Because you dare not!"

Then they had another quarrel; and presently, after a little glooming, to pass the time, yet another, hurling at

each other phrases that were fierce and fuddled, having little connection with the sentence just uttered, and practically none at all with the sentence yet to come.

Then Rudolf lurched to his feet, and vowed that if he were to risk a broken back that night he must have a last dance with his Kissy Girl. Scarcely had he left the box than Von Drasselburg and Laslov drew aside and whispered.

"What is it?" Fritz asked suspiciously.

"Rather too paprika for prigs," retorted Von Drasselburg contemptuously, and also left the box. A few minutes later, he could have been seen in the passage giving earnest instructions to Nadine, who, although figuring in the official programme of attractions as Louis Valdemar's partner, was unofficially at this time very much more partner to Von Drasselburg himself. Nadine listened with not a ripple either of dissent or amusement over her suave and inscrutable beauty—that Benda-mask of beauty which had made Von Drasselburg latterly so much the envy of his comrades.

Fritz was uneasy. Accustomed to a normal amount of supercilious treatment from Von Drasselburg, he was yet staggered by the sheer rudeness of his remark about paprika and prigs. The man would not have spoken like that if he had not been cocksure of winning his bet. He decided to give Rudolf a fifty-foot start, and follow discreetly. Suddenly he halted, and then quickened speed. His hare-brained fool of a brother was walking, none too steadily, with his arm pulled through a woman's, who must have accosted him just beyond the lights of "The Little Hot Dog."

"Herr Jesus!" muttered Fritz. "It's Von Drasselburg's Nadine."

A couple of strides brought him level with the pair.

"Look here, old man, excuse me for interrupting, but you haven't too much time if you are going to be at the Rother Adler by four o'clock."

"Rother Adler be damned!" swaggered Rudolph hilariously. He was drunker even than Fritz had anticipated—"If I don't do him down one way, why, I'll do him down another, and cheap at the price." He then proceeded to flatter Nadine, to the detriment of the Spanish horses, individually and severally. She smiled and drew him on.

Fritz realised that if the family reputation for courage were to be saved, he would have to do the job himself, relying on his strong likeness to his twin brother to deceive the others.

He had even less liking for it than Rudolf would have had, if he had been sober. He was back at his rooms in ten minutes, and in another five he had donned breeches and boots and slipped spurs into his pocket. Taking a whalebone crop from a rack, he let himself out into the deserted streets. A wind from the south-west had covered the sky with angry-looking clouds, and a scatter of rain beat in his face.

In these days of reduction of staffs, only one man guarded the Spanish horses at night. Fritz prayed fervently that he would be asleep, as he climbed the gate and dropped as silently as possible to the ground. He tiptoed in, and went right into the stall of the nearest horse—a stallion called Sultan. He saddled him quickly, drew the girths tight, softly slid back the heavy bolts of the gate, and led him out.

His hoofs sounded terribly loud on the cobbles, but Fritz gained the street in safety, mounted, and turning to the right, made for the high road that led south out of Vienna.

The beast he was riding was obviously unused to street and lamps. Twice he shied badly, and it was not until they reached the open country that he began to go at all steadily. Then he settled into a swinging trot, varied by spells of walking and an occasional canter on a grass path by the side of the road.

And the weather grew worse. The wind rose to a scream among the tossing pine trees, the driving rain stung Fritz's



face ; but this discomfort was small compared with the exhilaration that gradually took possession of him as his head cleared and he realised the magnificence of his mount. It must indeed have been worth while to have been an archduke in the olden days, to have a horse such as this at one's command. The enterprise, at first a desperate and distasteful effort to save the honour of his name, was now for Fritz the most thrilling romantic episode of his life. He was actually, in the flesh, on the horse of his dreams ; the importance of the venture added a subtle spice to his ecstasy, as did the continuous demands on his good horsemanship.

Fritz rode up the one cobbled street of Ebeldorf sooner than either he or Von Drasselburg expected, so that no one was at the door of the Rother Adler. But at the clatter of his horse's hoofs, the one lighted window of the inn was flung open. Von Drasselburg, leaning out in consternation, saw, through the fitful darkness, a glowing, reckless, triumphant face upraised, that was certainly more Rudolf's than that of the gentle scholarly Fritz they knew. He swore at the absent Nadine. "Curse the little bungler !" as the rider sharply wheeled his horse and disappeared.

"Nothing more to be done here," grumbled the man to his companion. "Come on, Laslov, let's clear out, and start the car !"

Fritz was pounding jubilantly along in the darkness. He, Fritz, had reached Ebeldorf ! He, Fritz, would surely manage to return Sultan safely. Von Drasselburg must surely be furious ; honour was preserved ; his brother's stupid poltroonery atoned for ; he, Fritz, the dreamy one, the inactive one !

Mounted there on that magnificent horse, his head a whirl of dreams and triumphs, his blood boiling, the wind

behind him, he forgot that it was over-long since his Pegasus had been ridden outside the Spanish riding school.

And it was Pegasus who first noticed the shadow, faint and long, dancing about in front of him and growing rapidly shorter and blacker—Pegasus, bearing his triumphant, chanting rider, who shied so violently as the car rushed past—first dazzling him and then blinding him as the headlights drew level and forged ahead. Pegasus, who, terrified by this phenomenon, dashed headlong towards the city. . . .

It had been a very late night at "The Little Hot Dog," and Veronica and Franz were walking home in the wet pallor of the dawn. As they turned into the Graben, a great white horse dashed by, like a ghost, riderless and galloping madly. The stirrups swung and clinked, his flanks were flecked with blood-stained foam, his coat dark with sweat, his long tail swept the mud.

"Good God!" exclaimed Franz, startled out of his usual composure, "it's one of the Spanish horses! Now how the devil——"

Fritz Beckendorf might have answered his question if he had not been lying on the Ebeldorf road with his neck broken.

And the pity of it all was that Rudolf did not even win his bet.



RING W. LARDNER

*Man Not Overboard*



## MAN NOT OVERBOARD

**B**EN BRAINARD posed for the newspaper photographers on the deck of the *Gargantua*, saying to himself: "There's a picture for page one—'Young Novelist Kills Himself at Sea.'"

He went into his cabin and opened his two bags. In one were a couple of clean handkerchiefs. The other was empty. He would tell the steward he had come in a terrible hurry, had not time to pack. The truth was that after eleven o'clock that night he would need nothing in the world, not even the clothes he was wearing. He wondered vacantly how long a man's clothes outlasted his body in salt water.

He sat down on the bed and felt pressing against him the little gun he had bought on Third Avenue a week ago, the day when he had planned this thing he was going to do. He would have been a week dead now but for his not exceptional aversion to funerals and his preference to die at sea, and the added fact that it was not quite a year since he had taken out insurance for £10,000 in favour of his mother and sister, and the suicide clause would still, five days ago, have been in force. The mother and sister had very little, and he realised that he was hurting them enough by just killing himself without, in addition, leaving them penniless.

His plan had been carefully made. The *Gargantua*, on which his friend Phil Runyon was purser, would dock on the eighth and sail again on the tenth, just a week after this Third Avenue shopping tour. He would be on board and would have Phil for a witness of his death to avoid any baulking on

the part of the insurance company. And he would spend the intervening days and nights in boundless drinking, such as would cause him to be remembered around New York as something more than the writer of two popular books and one which no publisher would accept. (Perhaps they would accept it when he had made his name better known by doing what he was about to do ; if so, the royalties would help his poor mother and sister.)

Well, he had had his orgy, opening and closing day clubs and night clubs till early yesterday morning, when he had been taken home and put to bed by his friend the purser after a party of whose details he remembered nothing at all.

The *Gargantua* was gliding smoothly out of New York Harbour. Ben Brainard went into the lounge and ordered three quick drinks to steady his hand so that he might write farewell letters to the members of his family and to the girl whose heartless treatment of him had made life intolerable. His last act would be to entrust these letters to good old Phil Runyon, just previous to his embarkation to another world.

To his mother and sister he explained the reasons for his deed—the failure of his latest and greatest work to win appreciation, and the loss of the most wonderful and lovable of all girls. He asked their forgiveness. He knew they would understand.

To the girl he wrote over two thousand words that would make her at least a little bit sorry, even if she were really as hard-hearted as she had appeared at their last meeting. (The girl was Pauline Lannin of the chorus of "Hit the Deck," and he might have known that a chorus girl, what with making quick changes and one thing and another, would never have time to digest two thousand words, especially as the ordinary daily extent of her reading was the captions in an evening tabloid.)

The bugle blew for dinner, but of what use was dinner to



a man who had only four hours more to live? What Brainard needed was enough Scotch to sustain his resolution, for it really is tough to pass out at the age of thirty, when you are a genius and there is so much good writing God wants you to do. It was this fear of weakening at the last moment that had influenced him to buy a gun. He was an excellent swimmer and if he toppled overboard without shooting himself first, a natural instinct of self-preservation might keep him afloat until the *Gargantua's* sailors had rescued him.

He had had one drink and was about to order another when a stranger stopped at his table, a man of robust health, apparently about fifty-five years old.

"Do you mind if I join you?" he asked. "I am all alone and I like company when I have a drink."

Brainard was going to lie and say he expected a friend, but it occurred to him that the time would pass more quickly if he had someone to talk to; listen to, rather, for he was not in a mood to do much talking himself.

"Sit down," he invited. "I am ordering a Scotch high-ball. Perhaps you'd rather have a cocktail?"

"No, make it two high-balls," said the stranger, and added to the waiter, "bring me the check."

"You can buy the next one," Brainard said. "I suppose we ought to introduce ourselves. I am Benjamin Brainard of New York."

"Not Benjamin Brainard, the author?" the other exclaimed. "Why, I read two of your books and enjoyed them immensely. But I certainly never would have guessed you were such a young man; your novels show such a wide knowledge of life."

"I guess I've lived!" said Brainard with a bitter smile.

"My name," said his new companion, "is Fred Lemp. I'm just a plain business man, with very little business," he added good-naturedly.

"Where are you bound for?" Brainard inquired.

"Paris," said Lemp. "Paris and Chateau-Thierry. And you?"

Brainard's face wore a queer expression. "I don't know," he said.

"You don't know?"

"I only know that it's a long way off," said Brainard.

"Oh, I suppose you are just wandering around, in search of material for a new book."

"I have written my last book."

"You mustn't say that! A man your age, and with your talent! You owe it to the world to keep on writing."

"Thank you, but I am sure I don't owe the world anything."

They had had four drinks and Brainard was now ordering another.

"I don't know whether I'd better or not," said Lemp hesitantly. "I hardly ever drink more than three, because after three I get talky and bore everybody to death."

"It doesn't matter to me if you get talky," said Brainard, and added to himself: "I don't have to listen to you."

"Well, it's on your own head," said Lemp, and ordered his fifth high-ball.

"Mr. Lemp," Brainard said, "what would you do—Never mind. I guess I'm getting too talky myself."

"Not at all," said Lemp. "I'd like to hear what you were going to ask me."

"Well, I was going to ask you what you would do if you were an artist in a certain line and nobody appreciated your work——"

"I'd keep at it anyway if I knew it was good work."

"I wasn't through. What would you do if you suddenly realised you were an unappreciated artist, and then, on top of that, a girl broke your heart?"

"Is this autobiographical?"

"Perhaps."

"Well, I'd try my best to forget her and I'd go ahead and do such a masterful work that she would be very sorry for what she had done to me."

"Forget her!" Brainard's tone was bitter in the extreme. They were awaiting a sixth drink.

"You said you were going to Chateau-Thierry. I was in the fight there. I wish I'd been killed!"

"My boy was," said Lemp.

"Are you going to visit the grave?"

"Yes, and also visit a little Frenchwoman who ought to have been his wife. Every year I pay her a call, to see if there is anything I can do for her, and her child. Every year I try to coax her back to America with me, but she won't leave France. I wish she would. I'm all alone now, and the youngster—he's nine years old—he's a mighty cute kid and would be company for me. A man gets lonesome sometimes. And my wife is worse than dead. She has lost her mind and has to be kept in a private sanatorium."

"Are you allowed to see her?"

"I do see her twice a year, on her birthday and on our anniversary. But I might as well stay away. She has no idea who I am. Poor Margaret! She is almost as beautiful as the day I met her."

"What type?"

"I suppose you would call her an Irish type—black hair and blue eyes. Just the type my first wife was; in fact, I believe it was her resemblance to Edith that made me fall in love with her."

"How old was your first wife when she died?"

"She didn't die. Poor Edith! I guess it was mostly my fault. She was too young to marry, too young to know her own mind. When we had lived together a little over a year, she fell desperately in love with a man I used to invite frequently to the house, a business acquaintance."

"Did she run away with him?"

"Yes. He had more money than I. I don't mean to say that Edith was money-mad, but she did like good times, and our marriage came just at a period when I was in desperate financial straits; rather, just before that period, for naturally, I had known what was going to happen, I wouldn't have married her."

"What did happen?" asked Brainard, sipping his eighth drink.

"You are an inquisitive young man."

"Oh, if you'd rather not tell me——"

"I might as well. I warned you I'd get talky. Well, my youngest brother went wrong. He was cashier in a small bank, out on Long Island, and he embezzled to the extent of twenty thousand dollars. He had gambled it all away at the race-tracks and in order to keep him out of gaol I liquidated all my assets and borrowed three thousand from a friend to make up the amount. I did it more for my mother's sake than for his; I knew that if she heard that he had stolen it would kill her." Lemp brushed a hand across his eyes. "She found out about it anyway, and it did kill her."

"Horrible!"

"I worked like the devil to get back on my feet, and I did it. But it was too late. Edith had gone."

"What do you say if we have a drink?"

"I say yes."

"And how long after that did you get married the second time?"

"Four years, and the same thing nearly happened again. My other brother, older than I, fell in love with a woman in Garden City, another man's wife. The husband found it out and there was a fight in which my brother shot the husband dead. There was no chance in the world of my brother's getting off, but I felt it my duty to give him the best counsel

obtainable. He had no money himself. I paid two lawyers forty thousand and my brother went to the chair. Well, I learned afterwards that on the very same day my brother committed murder, Margaret, my second wife, became friendly with a piano tuner. Of course he had nothing except his wages and she was not fool enough to give me up for him. But when those lawyers had taken all my capital she would have left me if Providence had not intervened. The piano tuner was hit by a truck on the Fifty-ninth Street bridge and lost his hearing."

"Did you have any other children besides the boy killed in the war?"

"Yes, a girl. But I'd rather not talk about her. Oh, well, what does it matter? Miriam was our first-born, a year and a half older than my son. One day she was driving a car up in Westchester County, going forty or fifty miles an hour, when she was stopped by a handsome young motor-cycle policeman, and the rascal told her he would let her off if she would be his girl.

"She said to him, 'I don't know what you mean by being your girl, but I think you're awfully nice-looking and I'd just as soon be your wife.' They were married and had three children. Then it was discovered that he had another wife and family in Ardsley. He was sent to gaol, she is a stenographer in an insurance office down-town and I am supporting the kiddies."

Brainard consumed his twelfth drink, then fumbled awkwardly in his pocket and drew out his gun.

"Mr. Lemp," he said. "I'm going to ask you to do me a favour. Put this right in your mouth, aim it upwards and shoot."

"What are you talking about, boy? Do you want me to commit suicide? Why, I'm only sixty-one years old and having a damn good time!"

"You do as I say and do it right in here so we won't lose the gun. I'm going to need it myself at eleven o'clock."

"What for?"

"To do the same thing you're going to do."

"But I'm not going to do anything except go to bed. What you intend to do is none of my business, though I would suggest that as you still have over two hours and a half to wait, you go to your cabin and take a nap and leave a call for eleven. I've always heard that the time to kill yourself with the best results is right after a nice nap."

Brainard had already started on one, but Lemp and a steward managed to get his room key out of his pocket and arouse him sufficiently to be conducted to the cabin, partly undressed and laid on his bed. Lemp then returned to the lounge and was soon joined by Phil Runyon.

"He's safe for the night, anyway," said Lemp.

"You've done a good job, Fred, and I'm grateful to you," said the purser.

"I made him cry twice, and there were three or four times when I nearly broke down myself. Here's his gun."

"All right; I'll take charge of it, if you're sure you don't want it. Though I don't know what good it would do you, as I emptied it yesterday morning after I'd got him to sleep, and I don't think we're selling any ammunition on the *Gargantua*, except what comes in bottles. That was a great party he took me on night before last. He insisted on dragging me to some night club and who should be there but this dame that's turned him down. She was with a man who could have been her father, but wouldn't want to if he was sober. I swear, Fred, she must be the manager's wife's sister ever to land a job in what they tell me is a pretty chorus.

"He was going to their table and make a scene, but I told him it would be cowardly to pick on a man as old as that. I finally got her eye and gave her the office to duck, and when she saw who was with me, she didn't hesitate a minute.

"Pretty soon Ben was worse than I ever saw him. He had his suicide plan all worked out and he gave me the details, thinking I was somebody else. He talked like this :

"I haven't much longer to live,' he said. 'In fact, this is the last time you'll see me. I've got it all fixed up to kill myself and a good old pal of mine is going to help me. I've bought a gun ; it's over in my room now, all loaded and waiting for me. Well, this pal of mine is Phil Runyon, purser on the *Gargantua*, and she sails day after to-morrow. I'm going to be aboard and I'll make a date to meet Phil when we're out at sea, and I'll coax him to one of the decks, telling him I want to discuss something with him where we can't be overheard. Then I'll sit up on the rail, and I'll sit so that when I shoot myself I'll be bound to fall overboard. You see, I've got to have him there, or somebody else that knows me, so there won't be any trouble about my insurance. How is that for an idea ?'

"Imagine him asking *me* what kind of an idea I thought it was !

"And the funny part, along about five o'clock, when I finally succeeded in getting him out of the place, he knew me and was calling me Phil and talking about other times we'd been out together.

"Yesterday afternoon I called up his hotel and made sure he was out ; then I went there and fixed it with a bell-hop and porter to go up in his room after he left this morning and pack up enough stuff for him to make the trip with and have it sent down to the ship in my name. He thinks he hasn't any baggage, but he's got enough to go over and back with, and I really think the crossing will do him a lot of good. Though writers are mostly all nutty, and you never know what to expect of them."

"I haven't told you," said Lemp, "that when I was through with my story, he gave me the gun and ordered me to use it on myself."

"Oh, Ben was always a generous boy," said Runyon. "It surprises me that he didn't offer to take you out on deck, shoot you and throw you off the ship."

"Listen," said Lemp: "I need one more drink for courage and then I've got to find my wife and take my scolding. I explained to her that I'd met a man I thought I could do some business with and I might not be in for dinner. But what good is that explanation going to be when she sees me?"

"Probably none," Runyon said cheerfully. "But the drink is on me."

About noon next day Brainard woke up, summoned his steward and ordered him to send the purser to his cabin.

"Phil," he said when Runyon arrived, "didn't we have an engagement last night?"

"Yes, but you went to bed long before your bedtime."

"Phil, where did that steamer trunk come from?"

"I suppose it came from your hotel."

"I didn't bring any baggage except those two empty bags."

"Did you plan crossing the ocean without baggage?"

"I didn't plan crossing the ocean. And another thing, who was the fella I was with all evening, a fella about sixty years old, named Limp or Lemp or something?"

"Oh," said Runyon, "that's Fred Lemp, a big hosiery manufacturer from up-state."

"Say, he's had a tough life. He told me all about it. He told me stuff enough for a whale of a novel."

"Why don't you write it?"

"Because I can't remember a word he said."

"Well," said Runyon, "we'll get you together again some time."

"Do that, Phil," said Brainard. "But make it out on deck where he can't order so many drinks. A man as old as he ought not to drink so much. It's liable to get him."



LLOYD HOOPER

*All Fools' Court*



## ALL FOOLS' COURT

ALEXIS MIKHAILOV was numbed by the soft-falling snow. For six hours he had been staring across the whitening country, awaiting the appearance of the first black specks that would mark the vanguard of the Swedish Army. Far across the flat plains from Finland the Swedes had marched, led by their king, who, so rumour said, could feel neither the bite of winter cold nor the dull ache of wounds. And Peter, Tsar of All the Russias, could not stay the progress of this conquering Goth. Peter, who was called "the Great."

The short day was ending and in the snow-darkened, failing light Alexis could see scarcely twenty paces. Soon he must rely on his ears to warn him of the expected Swedes.

Yet all sound was deadened by the fall of snow, and footsteps would be hard to hear on the single rutted road, stretching across the Russian plain, along which the Swedes must march. Alexis, for perhaps the first time since his childhood, understood the fear that comes with loneliness. He dreaded, too, the responsibility that had been thrust, unwanted, upon him.

His thoughts returned to the glory that had been his five days since. How, after the battle, Tsar Peter had called him, Alexis Mikhailov, to his tent. Exalted by the heady knowledge of his own bravery he had stared into the great, sombre eyes of the Tsar without flinching. They were the eyes of a madman, but in them Alexis had seen a gleaming

fury of resolve, resolve determining that the peoples of all Russia should turn from the slothful East and imitate the thrusting nations of the West. Build their boats, learn from them their art of war and perhaps one distant day rend them with their own weapons.

Terrible stories were told of Peter, as Alexis well knew. Yet in this great, savage-natured god he had found the hero his young fervour demanded. As he squatted in the white waste he knew only that he served the mighty Tsar of All the Russias. He longed to crush the bodies of the ravening Swedes, to triumph in their death anguish.

Then return, his blood still heated, to Anna. His proud, his lovely Anna, whose every movement was as a sculpture in his memory. Yet she was low-born and Baltic bred. And what great matter that in Peter's Court, when the Tsarina herself could boast but a peasant for her father? Equality for all the brave and all the beautiful! A kick for all snivelling priests, for all bearded cowards who feared to leave their age-trodden ways. Peter, great Peter, God love thee!

Sharply the present drove away the ecstasy of his thoughts. Niggling fear, fear of the unknown blackness around him, returned.

Then faintly, distantly, he heard the slosh of many feet in the snow.

"Rotopin," he spoke quietly, excitedly, "you and Nicolovitch return quickly to the camp. Tell Captain Obrenovitch Captain Mikhailov says that the Swedes are approaching on the Moscow road. We shall remain here until support or the order to retire comes."

The tramping, padded by the snow, grew more distinct. The seven men on the small knoll forgot the bitter cold.

A quarter of an hour passed, minute hanging on slow minute. Alexis strained to hear the sound of feet, but all again was silent. His men shuffled uneasily, continually

changing their positions. The tension of uncertainty gripped one and then another.

Suddenly from out of the blackness a man appeared. He moved forward, unaware of the presence of the Russians. A sharp flash lit for a moment his intent face, then he slipped without a sound to the snow.

Instantly from all sides there was wild shouting in a guttural foreign tongue. Quick bright flashes reflected palely on the snow.

At that moment all thoughts fled from Alexis, save one. Life alone was dear to him. Forgotten was his devotion to the Tsar, forgotten the glory that is brave death, forgotten his proud fury against the invading Swede. Deep terror drove reason from him. He screamed shrilly, boyishly, and raced down the side of the knoll into the darkness. Almost blind with exhaustion he reached the camp. He was the only man to return. . . .

It was a fortnight later that Tsar Peter celebrated the great victory of Pultawa. Charles of Sweden was already fleeing towards Ottoman territory. The Swedish Army was scattered, starving in the Russian winter. A few famished ghouls offered themselves to fight for their conqueror, who received them with all honour before, often with his own hands, he knouted the wan spark of life from out them. He was jubilant. Did not Pultawa mean that his great fight was won? No longer could Russia look back with longing to her Eastern ways. A Western Power had been defeated on the battlefield. He was exalted, trance-like, as a man that walks alone with God.

To Alexis the shouting and brute revelry of the camp was as the rejoicing of another world. His life had ended the night he had fled from the Swedes. Coward, coward, coward. The word flickered its ugly shape before him, whether sleeping or waking, for there was no second chance

in the Russian Army. Never could he forget the anger in the Tsar's face when he had been dragged before him, for it was the anger of great pain.

In the bloody helter-skelter he had been forgotten, left chained in the scullion's tent. They were too busy even to end his misery. Occasionally someone threw him a bone or a crust of rye-bread. Like a dog he was compelled to pick it up with his mouth, for his hands were never loosed. Anna, only, spoke to him as a human being. To her he was still the lover she had known in the quick night-shadows and bright days, whom she had followed far across the endless plain.

Never did she allow pity to show in her eyes, for she treated him as if he were still the captain who first won her. For her there had been no change. And among the sniggering of the scullions' crude jests he heard only her sweet whisperings. Life was but a constant bitter regret.

One night they told him his fate. He was to live, to live, they laughed. What guardian angel had he that took such special care of him? Surely he must pay the monks a liberal bounty! To live, to live, they cried.

For Peter was to hold a Court of All Fools. All was bustling and business. Alexis heard the mighty shouting that accompanied the Tsar as he walked about the camp. Pultawa! Victory! And he, he was degraded into being one of the fools and capering dwarfs. His life was spared, he was to be a clown. A sob broke in his throat into a fool's laugh.

The great tent was lit by flaring resin torches. Scrubbed pinewood trestles, laden with roasted suckling pigs and dark flagons of Tokay, formed three sides of a square. Skins and bright-coloured Tashkent rugs were flung haphazard to cover the bare ground.

The Tsar was in raucous genial mood. In the field, the battle over, he was one among his generals. He complimented

them on their great victory, pretending his had been an onlooker's part. All topics were fit jest save one. Russia, the new-moulded Russia, was a name sacrosanct.

Two hours the company feasted. Greasy fingers stuffed pasties and Tiflis sweetmeats into greasy mouths till paunches swelled and belts were thrown away as useless encumbrances. A fat dwarf sat in front of Peter and mimed his every action. Occasionally the Tsar leaned forward in vain endeavour to cuff his impertinent fool, all the while guffawing and shouting his applause. Ukrainian gipsies sang melodies that leapt and fell in lilting melody. The dark-eyed, loose-limbed girls twirled their red and yellow dancing skirts, but no one paid them heed till all the food had gone and the flagons were half-empty.

Tsar Peter sprawled across the table. "All Fools' Court," he shouted, and the cry was taken up with deep bellows and half-frightened screams. "All Fools' Court. Make ready All Fools' Court."

Then there was a scurrying and a rushing and the gipsy women climbed the toppling trestles to get to the man they had chosen. Men who had fought must love. Peter, his eyes already gleaming with a coursing madness, remained alone.

"Send them in," he shouted.

They came tumbling over each other, yelling, screeching, jumping. Dwarfs, hunchbacks, a tiny woman of exquisite doll proportions, a band of dark-skinned Arabs. Last, a giant, bigger even than the Tsar himself. In each hand he carried a sack, which he dropped in the centre of the tent. Around them the dwarfs snuffled and yapped like dogs.

Peter leaned forward. "Open," he said. His mouth twisted in vicious cruelty. "Open!"

The giant ripped the hempen sacking. Anna and Alexis lay sprawled opposite each other, blinking in the flaring light. Alexis was caparisoned in the full regalia of his rank, but the

brilliant cloth was slit to tatters. Anna was clad in a single garment of white silk.

There was a sudden silence as these two stood up. What jest had the Tsar prepared?

"Give him his sword," Peter ordered; then turned to Alexis. "Captain Mikhailov, my brave captain! I give you a royal chance to win back your honour. The Swedes are men bigger, stronger than yourself. The battle was scarce fair. To-night you shall fight my dwarfs. And Anna shall see your worth. Fight well, Captain, for Anna sits with me. Come, Anna, my beautiful one!"

Slowly, half-dazed, she stumbled among the clutter of dwarfs. Peter lifted and sat her on his knee.

"Your leave," he said, and kissed her mouth and neck. A roar of delight passed round the crowded tent. The fun was to their taste. Anna turned away her head, for she could not look upon Alexis.

Small, gleaming daggers were handed to the dwarfs, who scuttled, half-terrified around the motionless figure in their midst. Alexis stared at Peter, but his eyes were glazed, expressionless. He could not connect in his mind the fearless, conquering Tsar with the gross creature that held Anna in its arms.

No, he was still on the snowy knoll. The Swedes were coming. He could hear them. Tramp, tramp. There they were, all about him. Little, cowardly men. And in the misty, distance there was a vision of Anna and the great Tsar urging him to fight. What matter the numbers? He would win against them all.

A shout went up. "Fight, fight, coward!" Why were people shouting? They did not know his strength.

Then the dwarfs attacked, yelling little cries of rage. They darted on their victim from all sides, fearful of coming within his reach. For a second or two Alexis's sword whirled



glinting. Then his arm dropped, for he knew the folly of his dream. He was humiliated, a mockery, a coward. And these were dwarfs that danced around him.

Momentarily the dwarfs paused. They thought some ruse was intended. But still Captain Mikhailov stood motionless. He looked scornfully at the small men jumping about him. Instinctively they knew he would not retaliate. Two bolder scurried towards him, plunged their puny daggers in his back, and rushed back to safety. Still he stood, but his eyes were fixed on Peter. Then the whole rabble were on him, spitting at him, slitting his flesh.

Suddenly there was a great cry. "Stop, you midgets! By the Lord Christ, what have you done?" The excited buzz in the tent died away. What sudden change was this in the Tsar's mood? Peter flung Anna from him. "Go to him," he said roughly.

Alexis lay very still on the ground.

It was cold, but the snow had ceased. What sound was that? Surely the tramp of marching feet. Peter, great Tsar of All the Russias, I serve. His face, unscarred, for the dwarfs could not reach to it, stared up at the blackness of the tent. There, looking down at him were the lovely eyes of Anna. So gentle yet with an infinite yearning depth. That was her voice calling, "Beloved, my own beloved." His eyes closed for he was very weary and there was a great darkness all about him.



SIMPSON STOKES

*Air Lock A.G. 75*



THE family breakfast was interrupted by the familiar pip-peep-pip, pip-peep-pip, followed by a peremptory hoot, which signified that a Government message was coming through on the radio.

Mrs. Arbler's face whitened.

"I do so hope and crave it won't be another Gas Practice," she quavered. "The horrid smells, and all the scurrying and hurrying——"

"Ssh!" Her husband held up a warning forefinger.

"Stand by for Government Station O. 36," came an authoritative voice from the loud-speaker.

One of the children giggled. It sounded like Michael. Grandpa Arbler growled, deep down in his throat. "O. 36!" he echoed, derisively. "If it *is* another Gas Practice, they won't get *me* out again."

George Arbler held up his finger once more as the broadcast began to come through.

"Government Station O. 36 speaking, O. 36. His Majesty's Government greatly regrets having to cause inconvenience to the public, but there will be another Gas Practice Alarm this morning at eleven o'clock precisely."

This second voice was quiet and conversational in tone, as though announcing some everyday item of news. "It has been rendered necessary," continued the voice, "by the unfortunate ignoring of official instructions during the last mass practice, and by the disorderly last-minute overcrowding which

occurred at some of the Air-Locks in this area. Will everybody please listen carefully and remain standing by until the first maroon. Understand. People in Area O. 36 are not to move from their homes until they hear the first maroon. The Gas Police will take very strict action against any unauthorised persons found in the streets before that time.

"Promptly on the sounding of the first maroon every citizen will emerge and parade with his proper section. Arm-lets must be worn on the right forearm, with the identity number clearly visible in front. Infants in arms are not exempt. Parents, or those in charge of very young children, must see that they are paraded and kept in proper control, according to Gas Protection Regulations. On the sounding of the second maroon section leaders will give the necessary orders for removal to their respective Air-Locks.

"Once more it is necessary to state that no luggage or personal possessions of any kind are to be taken beyond what can be carried conveniently in the clothing and in the regulation kit-bags. Above all, Gas Protection Regulations insist that no foodstuffs are to be carried. Those in Area O. 36 will be well advised to spend their time until the sounding of the first maroon in reading aloud to their families or co-habitants the clearly-expressed provisions of the Regulations.

"Government Station O. 36 speaking. O. 36. Now will everybody please stand by until the first maroon at eleven o'clock. It is now nine thirty-five. Radio receivers must be left in tune to Government Station O. 36 in case of further announcements, and remember, that in time of real emergency, should attack from the air unfortunately descend upon us, the peace of mind and the safety of every citizen will depend upon prompt and quiet obedience to orders. God Save the King and His People."

"There!" wailed Mrs. Arbler, wringing her hands.  
"What did I tell you?"

"Curse the Gas Regulations," shouted Grandpa Arbler, blinking his bloodshot eyes furiously, and working his loose old mouth. "I'm going to sit here, I am, like every other sensible person will. They won't get me out."

Michael capered about in undisguised glee. "Patsy," he said to his small sister, "there's going to be a real gasser to-day—a real one this time."

"Be quiet, you little idiot," said George. "If you say such things outside, you'll frighten people out of their lives. Come, let's get the armlets." He went into the hall and returned with the medallions, each mounted on a broad elastic band.

"Hm!" he muttered, mechanically reading the inscription on the first medallion. "Area O. 36. Air-Lock A.G. 75. Section 271. Number 32. Adult, Male."

He began to fix the armlets, first on his wife, then on the children.

"Let's get these all ship-shape," he said. "Then we can finish breakfast. We had better eat as much as possible because we don't know how long it will be before the next meal. Now, Father," he added coaxingly. "It's no earthly use grousing. Even if you are determined not to obey orders it won't hurt to have your armlet on."

"I say," cried Michael, looking out of the window into the silent street. "There's the new berets. Aren't they bright? Do look, Patsy."

"Ah, yes," said George, peering over his shoulder. "Bright scarlet. Nobody can say they can't spot the Gas Guards a mile off now. And see. They've got scarlet cuffs, too, for signalling."

But Patsy was concerned with childish questionings. "Daddy, why aren't there any cars in the street?"

"Because they mustn't come out till 'All-Clear' on Gas Practice Days, Patsy. They would get in people's way, and

they wouldn't know which Air-Locks to go to in a strange district."

"But why can't we take some sandwiches with us?"

"That's because of the new neutralisation rules, Patsy."

"What for?"

"Well, you see, if a real gas attack came and we had any of it on our clothes or on parcels of food, we should be ill after we got into the Air-Lock. So we mustn't take any food, and we have to be neutralised—the gas has to be taken away—as soon as we get there."

"Why, look, Daddy. There *is* a car. Two of them. You said they mustn't, Daddy."

"Oh, those can come out, dear. They are Gas-mask lorries—Service lorries, you know, for people who happen to be shut out of Air-Locks."

"But couldn't we let them into our Air-Lock, Daddy?"

Here Michael intervened, with all the superior wisdom of his years.

"Of course not, silly. There wouldn't be enough cubicles for extra people. They'd eat our dinners, too, wouldn't they?"

Patsy was about to resume her catechism, when the hall bell sounded. "I'll go," said Mrs. Arbler. "I had better have something to do. I can't keep still."

She returned a moment later. "It's Hubert," she said, and then to the children: "Your Uncle Hubert, in his nice new beret."

She was followed into the room by a tall and stoutly-built gas guard, brightly adorned with the new beret and cuffs. He looked additionally bulky by reason of the gas mask at the "ready" position on his chest; the oxygen knapsack on his back, and the slung cylinder by his side. Moreover, he clumped in heavily on his double-sealed, impregnated boots, and the oily texture of his one-piece overalls gleamed and winked in a thousand places in the glow of the electric fire.



"Hullo, George," he cried heartily. "Hullo, Dad. Give me a kiss, Patsy. And there's Michael, the little rascal; all excited, I'll bet."

"He loves it," said Mrs. Arbler, gloomily. "But I'm terrified."

"Nothing to be afraid of," said Hubert. "It ought to go off as smoothly as an ordinary stand-by. We've got all sorts of improvements in organisation."

Grandpa groaned dismally. "The fuss they make about this silly gas. Take our chance, I say. It's all nonsense. The Russkies can never send over enough machines to matter. What's our Air Force for? Isn't it bad enough to be rationed and drilled, and ordered about, and made to pay through the nose for eggs and bacon and tobacco, without frightening women and children out of their lives with their silly practices? And look at business! The Working Hours Act has killed it. How can proper business go on when half the population is working on factory time and in the Air-Locks? It's all the Government . . . silly lot of fatheads in their rabbit burrows. I tell you the Russkies can't possibly reach London."

"They made a nice mess of Hamburg and Kiel," commented Hubert. "And what about Bremen and Taranto? We're not so far away we can afford to take risks."

"I say we are," contradicted old Arbler, glowering at the figures on his armlet. "In any case, why can't they simply issue gas-masks to every house, and let people put 'em on indoors?"

"You know they can't do that," said Hubert. "People are so silly, for one thing. They'd lose them, or bust them, and suppose some new gas came along at a moment's notice? Some sort of gas that would get right through those that were issued! Nice mess we'd be in. No. Air-Locks are the only way. Besides, there's food in the Air-Locks—enough for a year, they say."

"It's the mothers I am thinking of," said Mrs. Arbler. "Why, a child can't even have bronchitis or a bit of a fever without being torn away from its own little cot and put into the stuffy wardlocks. It would be a mercy if no more children were born. It's all one long, cruel suspense."

"It's all for their good, Jessie," said Hubert. "Better than parents rushing delicate babies out into the cold air when a real attack comes. Even after three practices, and all the Gas Regulations posted up everywhere, people still get panicky instead of obeying orders. You know what the Gas Guards had to do in Berlin, don't you? They had to shoot the panicky ones down like dogs; women too, to get the others into the Air-Locks."

"It's like living on the edge of the grave," said Mrs. Arbler.

"Well, look at our poor fellows on the Polish front, before they were served out with these Gassex overalls. That delayed gas fairly rotted them; got everywhere where there was wool, or cotton, or hair."

Patsy clutched at Hubert's sleeve. "Don't you ever go into the Air-Locks, Uncle?"

"No, Pat. I'm one of the chaps that have to take their chance outside."

"But you haven't been deaded yet, Uncle, have you?"

Hubert laughed, but did not reply.

"There hasn't been any real gas yet," explained George, and old Arbler mumbled:

"And never will be over here, the fools."

"What does gas look like?" asked Patsy.

"You can't see some kinds at all," said Hubert. "Other kinds might look like steam out of a kettle; yellow, perhaps, or greenish—it all depends."

"And does it come from the sky?"

"Yes, Pat."

"Why?"

Here Mrs. Arbler intervened. "Oh, run away and play, for goodness' sake. The first maroon might go off at any minute."

"Plenty of time," said Hubert. "We have over an hour yet."

Mrs. Arbler said: "Why can't they get it over quickly, and put an end to this dreadful waiting?"

"They can't. There's so much to do. Consider all the millions of people in the O. areas alone. And it must be nearly as bad in one way in the scattered places, where there might not be an Air-Lock within a radius of twenty miles. Of course, if only people would behave sensibly it would be easy. I don't envy the Section Leaders their jobs. The fools drag all sorts of things out of their houses—though it is only a practice."

George said: "I suppose a lot of people think that the practices may be only a Government dodge to prevent panic, and that it may be a real attack after all."

Hubert laughed. "Oh, I shouldn't think they'd do that. They would have to tell us Gas Guards, and the Lock Staffs, and then it would surely leak out. Besides we have our spies everywhere, and our air patrols. No matter how many planes flew from Russia, very few could get through our fighting rings and our barrages. We would have hours and hours notice in advance, even if it came to the worst."

A heavy lorry rumbled by, and Michael rushed to the window to see.

"It's another Servicer," he announced.

"Isn't it a pretty cap, Uncle Hubert!" said Patsy, climbing on a chair so that she could touch it. And Hubert took off his beret and gave it to her, revealing a perfectly bald head. "It's much better than the old peaked caps. We had to take them off to put on our masks. It was ridiculous to put them on again, on top of the bulgy fabric. When we ran they fell off every few yards. You never saw anything so silly."

George was about to speak when the loud-speaker burst into the pip-peep-pip staccato which was the Government call-sign. Then came the penetrating blast of the hooter.

"Stand by for Government Station O. 36," shouted an announcer, and old Arbler growled: "What do they want now?"

The quiet voice of the former announcer began again his meticulous speech:

"Government Station O. 36 speaking. O. 36. The Gas Practice announced for eleven o'clock this morning will be put forward to ten o'clock. It is now four minutes to the hour. His Majesty's Government feel that it will be in the best interests of the people to accustom themselves to emergency action of this kind.

"Accordingly the first maroon will sound almost immediately, instead of at eleven o'clock, in order to accustom people in Area O. 36 to emergency action. Will everybody please stand by——"

The voice broke off, as into the still air that brooded over the silent city came the heart-shaking boom of a maroon, followed by others, more distant, like giant drums vibrating from the sky.

Hubert snatched up his beret. "By Jove, I shall have to run. That's caught me napping. See you all when the All-Clear goes."

He darted off leaving the front door open, and through this aperture, and through the windows, came the clamour of a whole population in simultaneous activity.

Mrs. Arbler's face went white again. "I simply can't stand being cooped up and buried——" she began, but George thrust a small glossy-surfaced kit-bag into her hands, and pushed her towards the door. "Don't worry. You take Patsy along. Perhaps it won't last more than an hour." He kissed her hastily, and went over to his father.

"Now then, Dad. Come on!"

"I won't go," shouted the old man. "Nothing will make me go. Let the *cowards* go. I'm going to sit here. Tomfool nonsense."

George knew his father's obstinacy too well to argue any further. "You'd come quick enough if it was a real attack," he said, and with a regretful sigh, he left the old man crouched by the fire and went out into the tumultuous street hand in hand with Michael.

Everywhere people were hurrying and asking questions. Doors were banging, and windows being shut down. The noise of such an army of shuffling feet sounded queerly in the absence of wheeled traffic.

There were many cripples, and infirm old people, and excited children.

"Women and infants down here," shouted a Gas Guard at the corner.

"Women and infants down here," boomed a directional loud-speaker.

"This is fun, Daddy," said Michael. "But I wish people wouldn't push."

"Our parade is further on, sonny," said George. "You are to be with the men, this time, you are such a big boy. Aren't you proud?"

"Yes, Daddy. I'm a man now. Isn't Granddad silly, stopping in like that? He's missing everything."

"So he is," said George, hurrying on. "Ah! Here's our section. I can see Mr. Gallon there, lining them up. Hello, Gallon. Where do we stand?"

"Fall in there two deep," yelled Mr. Gallon—a big, red-faced man, whose hot breath made small clouds in the frosty air. "Drop those parcels, you in the check suit. No parcels. Can't help that. You know the Regulations as well as I do. And you, Whiskers. I won't have bundles. Nothing except kit-bags."

He stood back a few paces, surveying the straggling lines of men and boys.

"Any more for Section two seven one?" he bellowed. Then, satisfied that his flock was authentic, and having weeded out two or three who belonged to another Section, he vociferated like a loud-speaker.

"Section. 'Shun. I'm going to inspect all armlets and kit-bags. Front rank take one pace forward. Wait for it. One pace forward—march!"

The front rank swayed forward in a manner that would have made a Guardsman weep.

"Front rank men," shouted Mr. Gallon. "Grasp the neck of the kit-bag with the right hand and shove it forward as I come to you, so's I can see armlets and stoppers at one go."

He went along the line, cleansing it of all parcels protruding from pockets, spare overcoats and so forth. Some of his flock argued, but he was firm, and even ferocious, with a fist ready for the more defiant. At last he got them into something like order, and then came a weary wait in the icy cold. The hubbub died down.

The drone of an airplane formation flying east, high overhead, seemed, in the peculiar hush, almost like a dream-sound, startlingly unreal. The air was alive with thoughts and with the ghosts of unspoken questions.

"See here, Mr. Gallon," said a hard-faced old man with a straggling grey moustache. "Ain't there time for me to run this here parcel home? If I leave it in the street it'll get stolen."

"Can't help that," roared Mr. Gallon. "You shouldn't bring parcels. Orders are orders. Drop it, do you hear?"

Then, shattering the air with their deep bass explosions, the second maroons burst into life. All over the City they sounded, and all over the County of London, rapping their warning drumsticks on the tense fabric of the sky. Once more teeming millions stirred to action.

"Section. Left turn," roared Mr. Gallon. "Quick—MARCH!"

He fell in beside George Arbler as the untidy crowd surged forward.

"Some of these swine make me sick, Arbler," he said. "Utterly stupid and utterly selfish. Collectively, people are worse than sheep. We ought to have strict military discipline with all the exemptions. By the Lord! what's that?"

As they marched they had become gradually conscious of a strange, vibrant note in the upper air; at first low and muffled, but becoming momentarily sharper, clearer, more insistent. The noise seemed to be overtaking them. Now it was twanging overhead. It was like no known aircraft drone, and the shuffling column halted, as one man, and gazed upwards in puzzled scrutiny.

The sky was clear of clouds—a watery blue. Almost vertically above them, strung out in a line, were three strange cigar shapes, which appeared to be wingless. They were travelling fast—too fast to be airships. They seemed queerly isolated and without purpose. It was impossible to guess their size or altitude.

"That's new to me," said Gallon, staring. "What the devil are they?"

A Service lorry roared past, its hermetically-sealed driving cabin bulging over the front wheels like the snout of a monstrous mechanical bulldog. Those in the halted section looked at each other questioningly. The shuff-shuff of countless feet in surrounding streets resumed its brushing sensation on the ear.

"Come on," said Gallon. "Quick march. We're nearly there now. Forward."

Then, one after another, the three cigar shapes in the vault of the sky slowed down. A puff of black smoke emerged lazily from each. One after another they stopped moving.

For a second, which seemed a minute, they hung there, poised miraculously. Then they began to tilt, nose forward, and to drop, spreading fanwise away from each other. The vibrant noise ceased, and the three shapes sped silently down, as though on invisible oblique rails.

"Something wrong there," said Gallon, stepping out. "Come on."

"It can't be anything much," said George, though without conviction. "There would have been a proper alarm if it had been."

But from every street, and in all the air, the shuffling, plodding sounds of the moving multitudes rose to a crescendo of hurry. Many besides Section 271 must have seen those strange shapes!

Confusion began to beat its wings. Men looked with disfavour upon cripples in the ranks. Women caught their breath. Children looked to their elders with mute, white questionings.

Then there rang out from a parallel street the shrill voice of a woman. It was the loud articulation of Fear: "God almighty help us. It's a real attack. Run for your lives!"

"No running," screamed Gallon, struggling to stay the rush of the foremost in his section. "It's fatal to run."

But he might have spoken to the air. His section caught the panic. In utter disorder, and from every surrounding street, a wave of hysterical humanity converged upon Air-Lock A.G. 75. Where roads intersected sections fought each other for right of way. The careful planning of many months might not have been.

And the three cigar shapes fell upon London. As they loomed larger and nearer they developed a rushing, whining noise. Accompanying their descent were the scattered fragments of helicopter blades that had been burst asunder in the midst of the black smoke puffs.



One of the cigars seemed to be coming directly for the Rye Lane entrance to the Air-Lock. It passed obliquely behind the brilliant neon sign which reared the characters : "A.G. 75" high above the Lock. It seemed to George Arbler to be about twenty feet long. Then it disappeared.

There was a rending crash, succeeded by the rumbling avalanche of falling bricks and smashing woodwork, audible above the frenzy. The ground shook. Two other crashes followed, more distant. A cloud of dust from a wrecked building rose quivering in the air.

Women screamed horribly. Men gasped, fought and groaned in hellish discord. Bright scarlet spots in the midst of the surging crowds showed where the Gas Guards were fighting ineffectually to restore order.

"It's death to get into that crowd," said George, shuddering, and gripping Michael tightly by the hand.

They were in a doorway, thrown there like wreckage from the edge of a storm, and a man behind them screamed out filthy abuse. "The Government's done us in," he vociferated. "The treacherous swine!" He broke down, whimpering.

From the dreadful maelstrom around the Air-Lock staggered a Gas Guard, minus beret, gas-mask, knapsack and cylinder. His bald head was pouring with perspiration; the left side of his face was covered with blood. He stopped at the doorway, breathing heavily—unable to speak. It was Hubert.

He beckoned to George and Michael, and they followed him without a word, down Rye Lane, up a passage-way, and then to the left, passing beneath the railway bridges.

"Staff entrance," gasped Hubert, at length. "I sent Jessie and Patsy there—just—just before—the—the—rush."

"Thank God," said George. Then, in the numbness of his mind, he forgot about them. His face was grey and his unsound heart thumped wildly against his ribs. "What was

that thing that fell? I can't see any gas. I can't smell anything."

"Heaven knows what it was," said Hubert.

Behind them the shrieking uproar of the milling crowds grew fainter. It was as though they had howled until they could howl no more, and were now raging in desperate, gasping silence.

Michael was whimpering like a beaten puppy. When he fainted and fell George did not notice it, and Hubert had to turn and pick up the inanimate body. They came to a small cobbled yard, turned down it, through a small wooden door, and so gained the steel gates they sought.

"Connie showed me this," said Hubert.

"Against the rules for a street Gas Guard to know it, but she did."

There was nobody about. Hubert pressed a button and the door slid open. They went inside, and the door closed behind them. With the promise of safety George's conscience awoke momentarily within him. He looked, half-comprehending, at Michael, drooping in Hubert's arms.

"Couldn't we go back for Mr. Gallon?" he faltered. "He's a good chap. He was in the doorway."

He began to weep, but Hubert said grimly: "Everybody for himself now," and pulled a lever in the wall.

They were in a long, low tunnel, with gratings of criss-cross ironwork running down the centre of the floor. These gratings began to emit a thin blue vapour, warm and pungent.

"Open your clothes and flap them about," said Hubert. "We must get thoroughly neutralised before we go in, in case any gas has spread."

He busied himself with Michael's clothes. "We were only just in time," he said. "See. The boy's eyes are already one mass of inflammation." After an uncomfortable two minutes he picked up the unconscious boy and strode to the farther

door. George followed, as in a dream. A voice barked at them from a mouthpiece in the upper panel.

"How many?"

"Three."

"All right—come in."

The door slid open and closed again. Once more there was a long, low tunnel, but this time there was an attendant, staring at them grotesquely from behind a goggled mask.

"The first Lock," said Hubert. "Raises the air pressure. Keeps everything out. How's your heart?"

"Bad," said George.

"Can't help it," said Hubert. "It's the only way."

The goggled figure slid open the farther door. There was a faint, hissing sound, and a growing weight settled on George's chest. His temples were hammering. His scalp seemed to be fitting him too tightly. His breathing grew oppressed. Then, as he began to feel momentarily easier, they passed through to another tunnel, and when the door closed behind them the attendant was again cut off from his fellow-men—a goggled guardian of the gates between the upper and lower air.

They were in a sloping passage; now down some stone steps. Now in another tunnel, bearing away to the left. Confused noises came to their ears. Once more a door had to be passed, in charge of two Gas Guards this time, not wearing their masks, and bright with berets and cuffs. One of them spoke: "What's it like outside, mate?"

"Blue murder."

"So I thought," said the Guard, jerking his finger behind him. A few more steps and the fugitives emerged into a hive of subterranean activity—a low, pillared hall of vast extent, from which tunnels radiated in all directions.

On every side the air-locks were discharging people from the terror above ground. On every side arose the groans of

those injured in the frantic affray. Wild eyes stared with the delirium of horror. Many were in a state of imbecility. Children were shivering like frightened animals—but children were in the minority, as the hundreds of trampled bodies in the bloody streets above bore grim witness.

Notices and placards hung on every pillar. Loud-speakers barked instructions. Swift-moving staff workers tended, directed, questioned and guided. The crowds from the various lock entries were being continually sorted out and piloted down this avenue and that—to the seemingly endless rows of cubicles, each with their sleeping bunks, one above the other, like berths in ships' cabins. And the air hummed and palpitated with sounds of machinery. The refugees were sick with suspense, waiting for news, waiting to know what had descended upon them from the wintry blue of the skies.

. . . . .

And Old Arbler, crouched by the fire in the deserted house, heard the vibrant voices of the strange cigar shapes travelling overhead. He heard the rush and whine of their descent and the yelling turmoil of the people. He heard the three successive crashes as the robot-controlled, long distance torpedoes fell into the streets.

Conflicting emotions whirled through his brain. Consternation, anger, fear, disbelief, resolve, hesitation, chagrin . . . and then wild terror urged him into the open. He did not know which way to run, but came, nevertheless, into the open space before the Air-Lock. Dust blew into his eyes, making them smart. Through a watery film he saw the ground carpeted with the dead and the dying. High up against the outer gate of the Lock was piled a heap of corpses. He moaned with fear and began to run aimlessly, first one way and then another. Three Service lorries roared up to the spot. Goggled Gas Guards sprang from them and ran to the ghastly heap

by the gates. They began to extricate the bodies, one by one, with feverish haste.

“What about me?” shrieked Old Arbler, stumbling after them. “Give me a mask. For God’s sake give me a mask.”

But they could not hear his frantic voice through the fabric that protected them, and Old Arbler spoke no more. White-hot knives began to hack at his throat and downwards into his chest. Smarting agonies blinded his eyes and he knew that his end had come.

Down below in the Lock the survivors were sick with suspense—waiting for news. Above still reared on high the flaming Beacon of Safety which had now become the Tombstone of a Stampede—the dazzling, neon-lit sign: “A.G. 75.”



SHEIKH A. ABDULLAH

*The Shrine of the Holy Pir*





## THE SHRINE OF THE HOLY PIR

**A** FOOT and from afar came the troubled to pray at the Shrine of the Holy Abdul Pir. Came the halt, beseeching that their twisted limbs might be made straight. Came the distressed in spirit that they might have peace, the childless that the hunger in their hearts might be appeased, the relations of the sick unto death that their loved ones be made whole again.

Such a medley of brave desires burdening the hopeful carriers through scorching miles of a pitiless Eastern sun, until, having reached their destination, their own travail was forgotten, and, with their overburdened minds relieved, they hopefully started on the return journey, strengthened in heart to face a benign future which now held what an unwilling past had determinedly denied.

For sixty years had Alif Bux, the Keeper of the Shrine, tended the sacred grave. He had grown so much a part of it that no pilgrim would have considered his journey complete had he not received a charm from the pious keeper, who was looked upon with almost equal veneration to the dead saint himself. Tall, bearded, lean and bent, with long white hair hanging round his spare shoulders, he might have been Father Time himself.

Many disciples came to hear the teaching of the old shrine-keeper. Only the very new asked anything of the dead saint's history. Those who had for long been constant visitors realised that the sanctity of the deceased made such a thing as common inquiry a sacrilege.

One evening, after the pilgrims had taken their departure and but one disciple remained, quiet fell upon the desert shrine.

Sitting cross-legged upon the earth floor of his hut, while the rosary beads dropped through his worn brown fingers, the shrine-keeper fixed his dark eyes, still luminous, upon his faithful follower.

"My son, I am, as you see, an old man, having given my life to prayer and to the glorification of God. For nearly seventy years have I tended this shrine. It may be the will of God that any day now my work may finish. Who then would there be to give help to those who seek assistance on the problems of their daily life? Long have I thought over this problem, and it will ease what time may yet be left to me to know my successor. Having given much thought to this important question, the answer has been vouchsafed to me. You, my son, will succeed me!"

"Holy Father, I greatly fear my eligibility for the noble task. My worth to be the keeper of this holy shrine may be greatly inadequate. May Allah spare you many years of devoutness yet."

"Thy piety will continue to grow with age. Meanwhile, thy worth shall be proved. One requires little of the world's baubles in this quiet place, and Allah in His mercy provides for me out of His bounty through the pilgrims who supply me with all I need and more."

"What may I do, Father, to prove that I am deserving of so great an honour?"

"To-morrow at dawn thou shalt set forth into the desert, taking with you my staff and my donkey. Travel far and gain wisdom and understanding, and then when thou art aware of thy absence of fear, return, O Aziz Khan."

"So be it, my father," assented the young man. "May Allah be my guide and may thy prayers be with me."

The disciple spent the night in prayer and the dawn hour came when the aged shrine-keeper gave his blessing, his donkey and his staff to the pilgrim, and stood with hand-shaded eyes to watch the departing disciple.

For days the young man kept steadfastly on his way, eating of such fruits as came his way, scarcely sheltering from the angry glare of the noontide sun lest his body escape any trial. At night he lay where darkness overtook him.

Weeks passed, until the disciple had lost count of time as well as direction. Many a day he went hungry and thirsty. There were days when fever made it impossible for him to move. The donkey ate what grass the inhospitable desert provided, but there were times for it, too, when hunger, a thing it had never experienced before, gnawed incessantly.

Through it all, whether the blistered agony of the sun, the parched and swollen lips through fever, the lacerated feet, or the interminable loneliness, Aziz Khan saw only the proof of his fitness for the sanctuary tended by the hermit shrine-keeper.

One morning when both man and beast were weakened by hunger and thirst, the donkey was too ill to move. Again and again it strove to rise, only to fall. All their water was finished, and the young man sought most of the day for a desert pool without success.

It was late in the afternoon when he returned to the worn-out donkey. To his grief he found it dead. His loneliness was complete. The fact that his companion, albeit a beast of burden, was dead came as a blow to him. He grieved for it, remembering how well it had served his master and, as long as its strength lasted, himself. The unusual circumstances of its death made the poor donkey ennobled in life and exalted in death. This was no ordinary beast of the field to be left to the merciless talons of the flesh-devouring vultures.

Let it be the last act his failing strength allowed him, he would bury the donkey. It takes all the will of a feeble man to

urge himself to action, and the mournful duty of hollowing out a sandy grave for the last friend he could ever hope now of having was almost too much for his depressed spirits.

The sand had been heaped over the dead donkey, and, with his remaining strength, the pilgrim prayed for succour.

Almost before he had made the request the prayer was answered, for his eyes beheld surely what was a mirage or a derangement of the mind ! There, some hundreds of yards in front, was a company of horsemen. Voices now reached the sick man, shouts, laughter. Now but a hundred yards away the band halted. A minute or so passed and a horseman galloped towards him, asked who he was and if he required assistance.

Fear took possession of the feeble pilgrim. Suppose he told this man the grave was that of a donkey, they would not believe him. Suppose they accused him of murder ? The fact that exhumation is forbidden in the East would make difficulty in proving his words. He would say as little as he could and thus prevent either jeers or accusations.

The horseman informed him that the Sheikh was riding homeward with a company of his men, and would gladly give any assistance necessary to the traveller.

Merely saying that he was a pilgrim in search of truth, and that he was hungry and thirsty, Aziz Khan begged the horseman to thank the Sheikh and to request a little food and water.

The man spoke of the pilgrim in such sympathetic tones that the Sheikh bid him give water to the traveller and to say that food would be sent twice daily for as long as he cared to remain. Doubtless, said the Sheikh, the grave was that of some old pious saint who had died on the journey. Perhaps the young man was his disciple, who, naturally, did not care to recount the passing of his master.

Food and fruit came daily to the traveller, who soon revived. The Sheikh, having an inward respect for hermits,

paid a personal visit, saying it was his desire to erect a mausoleum over the grave, the best his means afforded, and the young man would do him honour by remaining as guardsman of the shrine.

At once the building was erected, and with every stone added to the structure the possibility of telling the truth of what lay beneath became the more impossible.

At last the magnificent tomb was complete. Every day food came from the Sheikh, and within a very short space of time pilgrims began to arrive, bringing their prayers and hopes even as they did to the other shrine. The majority of these travellers gave also of their charity to the keeper of this holy mausoleum.

The reports of the sanctity of both keeper and shrine travelled far, as good news will, be it desert or city, and the number of pilgrims who had travelled great distances increased ; so did the affluence of the shrine-keeper. This role which had been thrust upon him through no effort or desire of his own had now overpowered and defeated him. He was bound to remain, however mixed his feelings, until the perplexity solved itself and the agitation became less and eventually ceased to exist.

But, instead of ceasing, this new tomb created a cult never dreamed of by its keeper. People unable to walk were carried on litters through the isolated nudity of the flaming desert sun, all hoping that the good opinion of so esteemed a shrine-keeper and the benison of so worthy a saint would bring the missing ingredient to their health or happiness. Pilgrims who had previously made the perilous journey to the Shrine of Abdul Pir now undertook the still more hazardous road to that of Ahmed Ali Pir.

The aged shrine-tender found his living now almost gone and himself near to starvation. Repeatedly he had heard of the Shrine of Ahmed Ali Pir and wondered who this great saint could have been.

At last he made up his mind, frail as he was, to undertake the journey. Perhaps the attainment of this desire might mean for him in his now barren old age a second blooming. He would find out who this great saint, who had unwittingly robbed him of his livelihood, was, or die in the attempt.

His donkey gone, he was obliged to depend upon his feet for the journey. Weeks passed, as he went on through heat and sandstorm common to the desert traveller, until the day came when he arrived at the mausoleum of Ahmed Ali Pir.

He was surprised at the number of pilgrims in so desolate a part. It was prayer-time and the old man took his place at the rear of the worshippers. Prayer over, one by one took farewell of the shrine-keeper until only a few were left. When the young man caught sight of his old master, he was so overcome with confusion and humiliation that he fell down on his knees.

At first, Alif Bux failed to recognise in the now stout, well-cared-for shrine-keeper his one-time disciple, Aziz Khan, and, bidding the young man rise to his feet, embraced him and asked how it came that he had become the guardian of the great saint's tomb, whose history he had travelled so many miles to hear.

Aziz Khan trembled from head to foot and averted his gaze from that of his pious master. Here was Nemesis tracking him down with a vengeance. What was there to do but tell the truth ?

"My master, my face is blackened for ever before you, whom I respect and love. The truth must be told : in this magnificent tomb lies your donkey. It died and I feared to tell, lest I might be accused of murder."

"My donkey ! My donkey !" repeated Alif Bux in hushed tones.

"Even so, my master, but forgive me ! Great is my remorse, and my penitence and contrition I lay at your feet."

"Arise, my son, I will speak to thee. Know'st thou that for over sixty years I tended the grave of a saint?"

"Well I know it, my father."

"Thou also know'st that the sanctity of this new shrine became so much greater than the one which I tended that I lost my livelihood and was forced to leave. Now, having found my old disciple, it is my desire to remain here for the rest of my days."

More and more conscience-stricken as the days passed, Aziz Khan suffered mental agony in the thought of the net which had entangled him and seemed as if it would hold him now interminably to this shrine. One day, while talking to his old master, Alif Bux, he said :

"I fain would know the history of the saint whose shrine was your care for nearly seventy years."

"That history, my son, has never been told to mortal man, but I will tell it to thee, that it may ease thy burdened mind. That shrine was the grave of the grandfather of your donkey."





ALEXANDRE DUMAS

*My Adventure at Soissons*



## MY ADVENTURE AT SOISSONS

PARIS was in the hands of the revolutionaries, but the victory we had won in those three days of street-fighting at the end of July, 1830, seemed to be in peril. For at the Hôtel de Ville I heard General La Fayette, the leader of the revolutionaries, lament that there was an acute shortage of powder. If the Royalist troops were to advance on Paris, we should be unable to defend ourselves against them.

"Let me fetch powder, General," I said. "Soissons is a garrison town and must have plenty to spare."

"But it is a Royalist centre!" General La Fayette exclaimed. "You must be mad!"

"Oh, no, I am sane enough," I replied, "I'll even swear to it. At any rate, give me a pass so that I can see General Gérard."

I went to the table and scribbled the line, "Permit M. Alexandre Dumas to see General Gérard." La Fayette signed the order, and, since I still had the pen in my hand, I added the words, "To whom we recommend the project he has just made." That order gave me access to General Gérard, who was responsible for the military supplies, but he did not take to my suggestion with enthusiasm.

"And General La Fayette has actually recommended that proposition!" General Gérard ejaculated, when I had explained my intention of fetching powder from Soissons.

"Read for yourself," I replied, "the sentence is plain enough. All I ask, General, is an order calling upon the military authorities to surrender the powder."

"But the plan is impossible," said Gérard. "The chances are twenty to one that you will be shot. Besides, I cannot compromise myself by signing any such order."

"Yet I am prepared to compromise myself by carrying it out," I answered. "Let me draft an order."

I wrote quickly, and presented him with a sheet on which I had jotted down these words: "The military authorities of Soissons are requested to surrender all the powder in the magazine or in the town to M. Alexandre Dumas."

I had expected General Gérard to copy the order in his own handwriting, but it was perhaps lucky that he merely signed by draft. For then I was able to write below his name, "Minister of War." I hurried back to General La Fayette and obtained from him a proclamation addressed to the citizens of Soissons.

I had now all the documents I required for my expedition, but I felt that it would be convenient to have a travelling companion—if only for the purpose of securing decent burial for me in case of the disaster which Generals La Fayette and Gérard anticipated. As I came down the steps of the Hôtel de Ville, I espied a young painter named Bard.

"Ah, Bard, old fellow," I said, "come along with me."

"Where to?"

"To Soissons," I replied. "For the purpose of getting shot."

"I should love it," Bard said.

I asked him to fetch my double-barrelled pistols from my flat, and to meet me at Le Bourget, and the worthy fellow did as he was told. I had been born not far from Soissons, and I knew that the gates of the town closed at eleven. As it was three before I left Paris, and the distance was twenty-four leagues, there was no time to lose.

We changed horses every few leagues and covered half the journey in slightly over four hours. But at Nanteuil they

gave us an old postilion who regarded his horses as more important than the service of the Revolution. Since argument was lost upon him, I made him descend, drew his boots on my own legs, and, jumping up on the saddle-horse, went off at full gallop.

We created a sensation when we reached Villers-Cotterets. It is my native town and friends implored me not to go to Soissons, the stronghold of Royalism. I explained, however, that not only would I drive on to Soissons, but that I meant to reach it before eleven.

"You won't manage it," said a voice. "But I can get you in."

The speaker was a friend of mine, Hutin, who lived in Soissons and who, knowing the gate-keeper, could go in and out when he liked. Since there was no need for hurry in those circumstances, I thought that we might as well have supper. Cartier, the hotel-keeper, turned out a meal worthy of the occasion and twenty of us sat down to do it justice.

The opinion was that my expedition was doomed to failure. General La Fayette had said the chances were twenty to one against me, my Villers-Cotterets friends, with local knowledge, put the odds at a hundred to one and expressed the opinion that Bard and I would be shot before twenty-four hours had gone.

"Cartier," I said to the hotel-keeper, "I order a dinner for twenty at the same time to-morrow evening, on condition that it is eaten whether we survive or not. Here's the payment in advance."

"Keep your money," replied Cartier. "Pay for it to-morrow if you are alive. If not, I'll supply it free of charge in memory of you!"

We set off from Villers-Cotterets at eleven o'clock, and two hours later we were at Soissons. The gatekeeper recognised Hutin and let us all pass through. He little knew that

he had opened the gates of the town to the Revolution. We went to Hutin's house, but we did not go to bed. We had work to do first of all, for I had made up my mind that the white flag of the Royalists, which floated from the top of the cathedral, should be replaced by the tricolour of the Revolution.

Hutin's mother gave us the red curtains from the dining-room, the blue one from the drawing-room, and a white sheet completed the red, white and blue of the national flag. As for the flag-staff—the existing one would do perfectly well for the tricolour. Flag-staffs do not proclaim their opinions.

Our plans were soon made. Bard and Hutin were to substitute the tricolour for the Royalist flag, and I was to seize the powder magazine. Bard was to relieve me at the magazine while I went to the commandant of the town, M. de Linières, to seek authority for carrying the powder back to Paris. It was quite simple to decide how we should like to obtain the powder.

I stationed myself at the powder magazine, and as soon as I saw the Royalist flag come down and the tricolour go up in its place, I climbed the wall, holding my rifle ready for action. The magazine was guarded by three old soldiers of unquestionable courage, but I hoped that they would not be unfavourably disposed towards the Revolution. They were gazing in surprise at the tricolour floating over the cathedral when I jumped down and presented my gun.

"I have come for all the powder in the town," I explained. "Please look at this order from General Gérard."

They stared at me in surprise, but one of them read the order and was satisfied of its authenticity. Still covering them with my rifle, I asked them to give me their word of honour to go into their house and not stir without my permission. The promise was given and the three soldiers retired into their house. At that moment Bard arrived and I handed over the

command of the powder magazine to him. But before I left I arranged a little four-inch gun so that it was pointed at the main entrance.

"Smoke and keep on smoking," I told Bard. "So that if anyone breaks down the door you can pass a lighted cigarette across the priming." Bard raised no objection to a plan which gave him an excuse to smoke cigarette after cigarette, and I was on the point of setting out for the office of the commandant of the town when something occurred to me. I had given Bard my double-barrelled pistols, but he now had a cannon all to himself. A rifle, a cannon and pistols were excessive, so I took charge of the pistols myself.

It was not difficult to find the office of M. de Linières, and the sentry at the door paid no attention to me when I passed through. M. de Linières was engaged in interrogating an officer regarding the substitution of the Royalist flag by the tricolour.

"Pardon me, M. le Vicomte," I interrupted, "but if you want the full details, no one can give them better than myself."

"Who are you, monsieur?" the commandant cried in amazement.

There was some excuse for him. I had been fighting or travelling for the last four days and my clothes were torn and dirty. I lost no time in explaining my identity and the reason why I had made this descent upon Soissons. Then I produced the order given me by General Gérard. But it did not make M. de Linières any more favourably disposed towards me. He was an ultra-Royalist. Paris might be in the hands of the Revolutionaries, he had said, but Soissons would remain faithful to the King. Rather than allow the town to be captured by the Republicans, he would destroy it and bury himself beneath its ruins.

"You must know, monsieur, that I do not recognise the authority of the Revolution," he said, handing me back the

order. "Further, there is nothing to show that your pass is genuine—the document is not properly drawn up nor is it sealed."

"I give you my word of honour that the signature is really that of General Gérard."

"Oh, I don't doubt you for a moment," the commandant returned with a half ironical smile. "But further discussion is useless, for the magazine in this town does not contain two hundred cartridges."

The smile irritated me.

"Since you don't know exactly, monsieur," I said, "I shall find out from the three soldiers who are my prisoners on parole."

"Your prisoners!" he ejaculated.

"Exactly, M. le Vicomte," I said politely. "And when I have the information, I shall come back and pass it on to you!"

I went to the magazine and called out to Bard to ascertain the quantity of powder in the magazine. The reply was that the contents consisted of two hundred pounds, and with this information I returned to the commandant. As before, the sentry let me pass unquestioned. The commandant had been joined by the lieutenant of police and the Lieutenant-Colonel of the Engineers. The other officer was also present; I don't know who he was.

"I have sent for my colleagues," the commandant said in a jeering tone as I entered. "You can tell them the object of your mission."

"Merely a question of transferring powder from here to Paris," I said. "And, M. le Vicomte, you are badly informed—the magazine contains two hundred pounds of powder."

"That has nothing to do with it," said the commandant. "The point is that you come to a military town with a garrison of eight hundred men to seize our supplies. Suppose we refuse—have you a force to take it?"



"I mean to take it," I said, "and, once again, I ask for your authorisation."

"And you think, M. Dumas, that you can make me sign such an order? Perhaps you have noticed that there are four of us?"

I had posted myself so that I commanded the door and I had also prepared the double locks of my pistols. I drew them out quickly and pointed the muzzles at the others.

"Messieurs," I said, "unless the order is signed within five seconds, I will blow out your brains. As M. le Vicomte has pointed out, you are four—I have four bullets!"

I was deadly pale, but nevertheless my face showed that I meant to carry out my threat. The pistol in my right hand was only a foot and a half from M. de Linières, and, holding it pointed steadily, I began to count the seconds. When I reached "three," there was an interruption. A side-door was flung open and the wife of M. de Linières burst into the room. Her terror was apparent.

"Dearest, give in to him!" she cried. "It is another rising of the blacks!"

"Monsieur," said the commandant, "respect for my wife——"

"Monsieur," I interrupted, no less politely, "I have the greatest respect for Madame, but I have a sister and mother. Have the kindness to send Madame from the room so that we can fight this question between men."

"Dearest, dearest," Madame de Linières continued to implore, gazing at me with terrified eyes all the while, "do what he asks—I beg you, do what he asks. Remember the massacre of my father and mother by the negroes in St. Domingo!"

When Madame de Linières had cried that it was "another rising of the blacks," I had not understood what she meant. But now I did understand. She thought that I was a negro,

from my fuzzy hair, with my complexion burnt black by three days in the sun, and my slightly Creole method of speech. With the recollection of the murder of her parents by the negroes, she was overcome with fear. The situation was so strained that it could not be prolonged.

"How can I give in to one man?" the commandant asked me in despair. "It is impossible, monsieur."

"Would you like me to sign a document saying that you wrote the order at the point of my pistol?" I said.

"Yes, yes," yelled Madame de Linières. "Dearest, do give in. I beg you, let him have his order."

"Or perhaps," I went on to the commandant, "you would prefer me to rake up two or three friends so that we are four on each side?"

"Yes, monsieur," the commandant replied.

"Very well, M. le Vicomte," I said. "But beware—I am relying upon your word of honour not to move a single step."

The commandant and the other officers gave their word, and I uncocked my pistols.

"It is all over, Madame," I said to the commandant's wife; and, turning to the officers, I added, "Messieurs, expect me back in five minutes."

I left the office, but I had no idea where I was to find the supporters to make the numbers equal on both sides. In the street, however, I saw Hutin and a friend of his, Moreau, and I signalled to them to come into the courtyard and take up a position outside the window of the commandant's room. Then I returned to face M. de Linières. The parole had been strictly kept and the officers had not stirred.

"Be good enough to inform M. le Commandant," I said through the window to Hutin and Moreau, "that you will fire immediately if the order to carry away the power is not signed?"

Hutin and Moreau pointed their guns.

"Enough, monsieur," said the commandant. "I am ready to sign."

In a few moments I had the required authorisation signed by M. de Linières. It empowered me to take away all the powder in the magazine, and I needed nothing more. I apologised to Madame de Linières for my unavoidable intrusion and joined my friends outside. It was suggested that I ought to do things in a legal way and that I should seek the assistance of the Mayor. When he saw my authorisation, the Mayor accompanied me to the magazine without question, and nothing could have been more legal than the proceedings when, in the presence of the Mayor, and by virtue of the order signed by the commandant, I called upon the guards to open up the magazine.

It contained less than two hundred pounds of powder. I was getting ready to arrange for its transportation when the Mayor claimed the powder for the defence of the town. That was not unreasonable, but I had not come so far and gone through so much in order to be stopped at the last by the Mayor. I was, therefore, on the point of replying that I could not admit the claim when one of the soldiers whispered to me that a storehouse in the town contained no less than three thousand pounds.

I told the Mayor that if I found three thousand pounds he was welcome to the total contents of the powder magazine, and hurried to the keeper of the storehouse. That individual, however, would not give up the key, so it was necessary to leave him locked in his house and gain entrance to the storehouse ourselves. After doing everything else so legally, it was unfortunate that we had to break down the door with axes.

We found the three thousand pounds and arranged for a wagon to carry it back to Paris for the use of the Revolutionaries. I was dead tired after the travelling and the excitement,

and I slept most of the way back to Paris. At nine o'clock next morning I presented myself to General La Fayette. He had lost his voice and could not speak a word of welcome. But he held out his arms and embraced me—he could at least do that.

And the powder which Bard and Hutin and I had fetched twenty-four leagues from a garrison town with eight hundred soldiers? Well, it turned out not to be used by the Republicans. For, during my absence, things had moved quickly in Paris. The conservative elements had decided to try another king, and the Republic we had fought to establish by our struggle in 1830 had vanished. The Duke of Orleans had been invited to ascend the throne. "Invited" is hardly the right word—an ultimatum had been issued to him. "The crown or a passport," he had been told; and as the Duke of Orleans did not care for exile and did like to think of himself as King of France, he chose to reign under the name of Louis-Philippe.

Paris had known me as a dramatist, but the news of my adventure at Soissons had spread through the capital, and I gained a reputation as a man of action. The new king, who was well aware of my activities in the theatre, had learned of my expedition and summoned me to him. "Monsieur Dumas," he said, "you have produced your best drama!"

P. C. WREN

*The Statue and the Bust*



## THE STATUE AND THE BUST

**I**N the ranks of the Foreign Legion are to be found representatives and exponents of almost every trade, profession, calling, vocation, science and art known to man.

It was the boast of the Colonel of one battalion that not only could his men build *and* decorate a church, but could provide the priest to officiate therein, not to mention the organist and a magnificent choir of male voices.

On one occasion, in a garrison town and in piping times of peace—in other words, while the battalion was withdrawn from campaigning for a much-needed breathing-space, rest and recuperation—the Colonel (Major or *Chef de Bataillon*, really) decided to throw a party.

It was to be a really big affair and handsomely done, *ad majorem legionis gloriam*, to give pleasure and satisfaction to the General ; still more pleasure and satisfaction to the lady whom the Colonel delighted to honour and hoped to marry, and to redound to his own credit and to further his advancement.

There was to be a kind of garden-party on a scale of unprecedented magnificence ; an *al fresco* dinner in a great marquee ; and, the *pièce de résistance* ; a splendid theatrical show, concert, variety entertainment, and stage play provided entirely by the men of his battalion.

And this entertainment was to be given in a theatre especially built for the occasion.

When one says built for the occasion, one means, literally, for the occasion. A wonderful mushroom growth which

should arise from the sands on which the camp was pitched almost overnight as does a great circus tent.

And swiftly as it arose, even more swiftly should it depart. The Colonel, like the magician of the Arabian Nights, should wave his wand, his genii of the Legion should appear, set to work, and the magic palace (of varieties) should materialise ; and with another wave of his wand next day should disappear. . . .

First of all, the Colonel talked the matter over with his second-in-command and the Adjutant-Major. Then, at mess that night, he enlarged upon the subject, giving his imagination full rein and his ideas full play.

As he aired his notions new ones occurred to him, and the scheme grew and grew, going from strength to strength, until to some of his hearers at least it seemed altogether too strong.

However, for the Colonel to command was for the battalion to obey. The right men were sought out, the right materials sought for, difficulties overcome, objections silenced.

Sure enough, men were found for the work ; carpenters in plenty (and it was they who were in most demand for the construction of the temporary theatre), decorators, architects, draughtsmen, bandsmen, actors, singers, soloist musicians, acrobats, a juggler, a raconteur (his repertoire heavily censored), a musical clown, a comic singer—in short, everything that the most exacting theatre proprietor, impresario, stage manager—and audience—could desire. And all done by the battalion.

With the way things went the Colonel was pleased. And, what is more, he actually said so.

Inspecting the theatre a day or two before his grand *tamasha*, he observed, with pardonable pride, to his friend, a Colonel of Spahis who accompanied him :

“Well, *mon ami*, what do you think of that ? That’s one of the things even the Spahis couldn’t do, eh ? Build and



equip a theatre, even if they could provide the talent to perform in it."

The Spahi Colonel smilingly admitted that, although he'd never tried, he didn't really suppose he could find quite such a heterogeneous galaxy of talent in the ranks of his regiment, adding, somewhat unnecessarily :

"But, of course, we are only cavalry soldiers !" with a slight accent on the "soldiers."

And as they stood in the foyer, taking a last glance round—for positively the theatre had a foyer, off which opened cloak-rooms wherein both the lady and gentlemen guests might leave impedimenta—the Spahi Colonel remarked :

"Marvellous ! Truly marvellous ! . . . Positively the only improvement I can think of, to make it absolutely the real thing, is the usual statue holding a lamp. . . . Just there, at the entrance to the auditorium."

The Colonel laughed.

"It shall be done, *mon ami*," said he. "You are quite right. It wants a noble statue, just there. It shall be done."

Really the Colonel was going it, running past himself altogether, surely. Even supposing that there were in the ranks of his battalion a sculptor, how on earth could he be expected to produce a statue in so brief a time ?

And although he boasted that he had a representative of every trade on earth, it was hardly likely that he would happen to have a genuine sculptor ; and, if he had, how on earth was the man to produce even the materials and tools for making the statue in so short a time ?

And, failing that, where on earth was he to find a statue ? There certainly wasn't one in Maraknez. Why, there wasn't such a thing for hundreds of miles. [Probably the nearest was in some hotel or theatre in Algiers, or perhaps Tangier.

The Spahi Colonel smiled.

His *cher collègue* was surely talking through his hat this time.

And so the Colonel himself began to think in his calmer moments and the privacy of his tent. It had been a very foolish boast to make. A silly thing to say. However, he had said there should be a statue, and a statue there should be.

How? He didn't know, and he didn't care. He merely announced at mess that night: "Gentlemen, I congratulate you all. I congratulate the battalion, in the persons of its officers. The theatre is really wonderful."

Subdued applause.

"But it lacks one thing."

Anxious eyes all turned, as one, upon the Colonel.

"It lacks one thing. A statue in the foyer. I leave it to you. You will parade your men. You will find a sculptor; several sculptors if necessary. They will find a suitable block of stone and will all work upon it at once, night and day, if necessary. The best of them all will do the finishing touches. . . . *Finis coronat opus*. It is to be a statue of—er—Hercules, we'll say . . . a magnificent figure of a man with noble muscles. . . . Please and delight the ladies . . . the right arm to be raised and the hand to be pierced to hold a lamp. . . .

"Yes. A statue of Hercules, by Saturday night. That's all. With every confidence I leave it to you."

Quoting someone or other, the Colonel had once remarked to Lieutenant Forqueray that it was indeed a very good thing for a young man to be a pushing young man, but definitely a bad thing for a young man to be known as a pushing young man.

The Colonel knew the lieutenant to be a very pushing

young man and, while admiring his pushfulness, disliked his personality.

But it must be admitted that on this occasion he went up several steps in the Colonel's estimation when, requesting an interview, he announced that the Colonel might set his mind at rest on the question of the statue for the foyer of the theatre.

While other officers had shaken dubious heads, prophesied that the Colonel had for once promised more than he could perform, and wondered what on earth was to be done about it, Lieutenant Forqueray had set to work.

"You've actually got a statue, *mon enfant*?" asked the Colonel.

"*Non, mon Colonel*," replied Lieutenant Forqueray truthfully "I've not yet got the statue—but *you* have as good as got it. You may rely upon me, and you may count upon it."

The Colonel eyed the young man appreciatively, kindly, indulgently, one might almost say admiringly.

"I shall not forget it, my boy," smiled the Colonel, and made a note to the effect that there are worse things than push in a young man who intends to make his way and to please his Colonel.

At luncheon that day the good news was announced.

"Now, how the devil has he managed it?" speculated the Second-in-Command. "Supposing he'd got wind of a statue of sorts, from some dive or other, think of the cost and trouble of transport. . . . For there's certainly no such thing in Maraknez."

"Hope the young fool hasn't sent a squad of his scoundrels to raid a public building somewhere," growled his neighbour. "Nice thing if he has hauled it off the façade of some Hôtel de Ville or Palais de Justice!"

"Wonder if he's been to the excavations at Tipagad and got hold of a genuine Greek or Roman statue," mused Captain Couperin.

"Sounds altogether too timely and neat and *à propos*," observed another officer. "Besides, they wouldn't let him get away with it. Altogether too valuable. . . . But it's just possible he may have done something of the sort. If so, there will be a frightful hue and cry. Well, it's his funeral. Personally I shall believe it when I see it. But, *mon dieu*, he must produce a statue, since he's definitely informed the Colonel that he's going to do so. . . . I wonder if it is humanly possible to make one—that would pass muster in a dim light—of some sort of composition?"

"A statuette, perhaps," replied his friend. "If they'd got a real live Latin Quarter sculptor. But where would they get the stuff for a life-sized statue, clay or composition—or whatever they use? As for carving one out of a block or marble, it is obviously impossible . . . absolutely. I should think it would take weeks."

"Well, yes," speculated the other, "if you were going to do it for the Conservatoire des Arts, and all that ; but we aren't expecting a Rodin statue of Carrara marble. A gang of them might knock up something out of sand-stone, and a clever chap put the finishing touches. . . . Or some clever devil might do some impressionist thing in dry mud and whitewash. I don't know, I'm sure. Anyhow, I shouldn't care to be in Master Forqueray's shoes if he lets the Colonel down."

Lieutenant Forqueray was not a popular officer. On the contrary, although he had not been long with the company, he was already detested by the men under his command. Not once had he been known to take any personal interest in the health, comfort, and welfare of *les légionnaires* ; to look into any case of punishment and find out whether right was on the side of the accused soldier ; to spend a penny of his own money on wine for thirsty *légionnaires* ; or to take the trouble to learn

the name, or remember the face and record, of any of the men under his command, except, perhaps, a few notorious offenders whom he himself perpetually punished, like le McSnorrt and Spanish Maine.

And of all those who hated him, none did so more bitterly than the ex-gentleman known as Spanish Maine.

There were those who believed that the *légionnaire* and the officer had known each other, years before, in private life, and that there was some ancient and long-standing reason for the feelings of bitter contempt and savage hatred which the soldier entertained for his officer.

While other members of his *escouade* freely expressed their detestation of Lieutenant Forqueray, Spanish Maine found that words failed him. Deeds might not, however; and it was generally considered that should Lieutenant Forqueray on active service get between Spanish Maine and the enemy, his position would be doubly unwholesome.

. . . . .

And yet when the lieutenant, parading his men, bade them produce stone-masons, a sculptor, and a statue, on pain of death and deprivation of wine until the order had been obeyed, it was Spanish Maine who, smiling subtly, had stepped into the breach.

After a minute's thought, while others stonily contemplated the transcendentalism of impossibility, Spanish Maine, taking a pace to the front, had announced that he could and would produce a perfectly satisfactory statue in the required time—just in time and only just.

Lieutenant Forqueray eyed *le légionnaire* Maine with mingled delight and distrust, hope and fear, approval and suspicion.

Certainly this was not the man from whom he would have expected help. No, he was almost the last man in the company

who might have been expected to come forward and assist his officer in emergency.

Not only was he a *mauvais sujet*, like his friend and enemy the strange *Ecossais* whom they called le McSnorrt, who was not a good *mauvais sujet*—not a good Bad Man—at all. There was a veiled insolence about him, and not too thinly veiled, either, that Lieutenant Forqueray did not like. He had too much of a way with him; too much of an air altogether—in the presence of an officer. All very well for a *légionnaire* to swagger—very right and proper—and all very well for an ex-officer, ex-nobleman, or whatever he was, to retain some of his self-respect and put on a certain amount of style. But in the presence of Lieutenant Forqueray he was nothing, less than nothing: a dog; a *légionnaire*.

And it is very difficult for an officer, very anxious to be known as a disciplinarian and a strong man, to charge a soldier with having a gleam in his eye, a twist to his lip, a hint of a sneer on his face.

And yet here was the dangerous, difficult, undisciplined scoundrel who feared neither man nor devil nor God, nor even Lieutenant Forqueray (and certainly did not love him), offering to do the thing on which the lieutenant had set his heart.

“Oho! *You!*” he said in surprise. “Have you been a sculptor, then?”

“*Oui, mon officier.*”

“Oho! And you can make a life-sized statue of a man? In time?”

“*Oui, mon officier.*”

“What, a genuine Hercules?”

“Say Apollo, *mon officier.*”

“Say what you like—so long as you can have it ready by Saturday night. Can you?”

“*Oui, mon officier.* I can. . . . Or, rather, I could, if I were

given certain help and facilities. And there were no interferences. And no questions. . . .”

“Anything you like, *mon enfant*. Any mortal thing in reason. What do you want?”

“A hundred francs ; three men to help me ; a covered cart to take the statue to the theatre ; and a tent to ourselves. We should have to be excused all duties until Sunday.”

“H’m ! A hundred francs ! What for ?”

“Materials, tools. . . . Expert assistance. . . .”

“Very well. Given the money and the other facilities, you can guarantee the statue ?”

“*Oui, mon officier.*”

“You know what’ll happen if you get a hundred francs and I don’t get the statue !”

Spanish Maine smiled.

“Where are you going to get the block of stone ?”

“That’ll be our secret, *mon officier.*”

“And how soon can I see something ? . . . Some proof that the statue is—what shall we say ?—come to life ?”

“Not at all, *mon officier* ; until it is in place in the foyer of the theatre.”

“Aha ! That’s curious. Looks to me as though you are going to steal one, ready-made ; and that’s what you want the covered cart for, eh ? And the tent to hide it in ?”

“The statue will be there in place when the Colonel’s guests enter the theatre, *mon officier*—provided I am given what I need, no questions are asked, and there is no interference. . . . Otherwise, I can promise nothing. In fact, I must withdraw the offer.”

“But, look here, man. How can I absolutely assure the Colonel that the statue will be there ? . . . If I give him my word that I am going to produce the thing by the night and I don’t do it . . . well . . . !”

“Have no fear, *mon lieutenant* ; if you agree to my terms, a

perfect statue of Apollo will be in the required place at the proper time."

Lieutenant Forqueray gazed long and hard into the eyes of Spanish Maine.

"So be it," said he. "Everything you ask. . . . And God help you if you fail me."

And thus it had come about that Lieutenant Forqueray, self-confident optimist, incorrigible gambler, ambitious, and pushing young man, took a chance and definitely promised to provide the statue the Colonel had undertaken to produce.

Of course it would be all right. Spanish Maine and his scoundrels could be relied upon to make, beg, borrow, or steal (particularly steal) anything.

Nor would Spanish Maine have dared to make the promise had he not seen his way to fulfilling it. They must know of a statue that they could get, or must know of some way of making one. Probably it would be a case of theft, since no questions were to be asked, there was to be secrecy and concealment, and the thing was not to be on view until the moment when it was required.

Perhaps not a case of theft so much as of sudden borrowing and quick return.

Anyhow, the less one knew about it the better; and those who asked no questions would be told no lies. Of course it would be all right.

On the afternoon of the great day the Colonel made a tour of inspection of the theatre. A really wonderful piece of work reflecting the very highest credit upon the architects, designers, masons, carpenters, decorators, electricians, upholsterers, painters and scenery-artists of the battalion.



The Colonel could find no fault ; and, although the promised statue was not yet in position, its wooden plinth was there, cleverly painted to resemble marble.

Even the name Apollo was painted on it, and the flex and lamp ready for affixing to the hand of the statue, as soon as it was in position.

"There will be no hitch, Forqueray ?" asked the Colonel anxiously.

"None whatever, sir," replied the lieutenant. "The statue is already in camp, and will be in position here in time for the lamp to be fixed to the raised hand."

"Hand being pierced or adapted, I suppose ?" said the Colonel.

"Yes, sir," replied the lieutenant, whose information was indeed to that effect. I am informed by a *légionnaire* who has been helping that it is a magnificent piece of sculpture, exactly life-size, absolutely life-like, and in every way just what you want. . . . Might have been designed for the purpose."

"You haven't seen it yourself ?"

"No, sir. My rascals don't want anyone to see it until it is absolutely ready and in position. . . . Of course, the time has been very short, indeed, and it is not quite ready yet ; and one can understand their not wishing anyone to see it until it is. . . ."

"Quite ! Quite !" agreed the Colonel. "Want to spring it on us in all its glory—complete, eh ?"

"Yes, sir. I thought it best to humour them. I guarantee they'll have it here to time all right."

"Well, I'm relying on you, *mon enfant*," said the Colonel once again, smiling indulgently.

The garden party was a great success. The dinner, if

possible, an even greater one ; so much so that it was almost with reluctance that the Colonel's guests at length rose from table to attend the theatrical show in the Palace of Varieties.

As, with the General on his left hand and the lady of his choice upon his right, the Colonel entered the foyer, followed by the large gathering of guests, he felt that this was one of the great moments of his life. The little cries of admiration from the ladies, the encomiums, the words of warm praise from the General and his staff were music in the Colonel's ears.

It was, indeed, as they said, wonderful ; and in the roseate glow of the shaded lights it looked so real, so permanent. It was almost unbelievable that at a wave of his wand it had arisen almost overnight. . . . Yes, at a wave of his wand. . . . And some day he'd wave a Marshal's baton, and not only a battalion but great armies would move at his bidding.

Yes, and there was the statue, exactly as Forqueray had promised. Excellent young Forqueray ! A pushful young man, and known as a pushful young man, but he had certainly pushed to some purpose on this occasion.

A magnificent statue. A veritable Apollo, indeed ; white and gleaming, holding aloft a lamp.

Splendid. Might have come straight from Athens ; from the Louvre ; from the Naples Museum ; from the Ecole des Beaux Arts—any old where. Might be the work of Praxiteles, Pheidias, Myron—any old body. (Seen after dinner and a bottle or so of most excellent wine, anyhow.)

Look at the muscles . . . and the face. Somehow much more real-looking, human-looking, than most of those old statues.

The eyes. . . .

"What a *beautiful* statue, Colonel !" said the lady. "I really do think that it is the crowning touch. A marble statue *here*, in the heart of Maroc. . . . Wherever did you get it ?"

"Get it ?" smiled the Colonel, patting the hand that lay

upon his sleeve. "Did you say 'get it' ? . . . We produced it, my dear lady, as we produced all the rest of the theatre. Our own sculptors !"

"Heavens above !" wondered the lady. "Is there *anything* the Legion cannot do ? One would say that statue was the work of a Great Master, and a couple of thousand years old. It might almost be alive. . . ."

Heavy curtains leading into the auditorium were flung aside, and a strong cool draught blew through the entrance into the foyer.

Definitely cool.

"Positively alive," murmured the General.

"*Atishoo !*" sneezed Apollo.

"Autumn !" said the Brigade-Major beside him. "What the Americans call the Fall," as a leaf fell—a fig-leaf.

"Quite positively alive," exclaimed the lady, as Apollo, leaping from his pedestal, fled for his life.

"So much for the Statue !" murmured Spanish Maine, a month later, as he came out of prison fingering a hundred-franc note. "So much for the statue. Now for the bust !"



PHYLLIS BENTLEY

*Conversion*



## CONVERSION

**W**HEN I read Peregrine Willard's new novel I must confess I was surprised.

Young Peregrine's literary reputation, though rather of the precious kind, was by no means to be sneered at. He has always been spoken of as "the brilliant" rather than as "a rising" young novelist, and you must agree the difference is considerable. Then he is tall and rather broodingly dark, which helps ; and he wears a fine black beard. He is, too,—or was before this last book of his—the darling of a certain by no means stupid literary clique.

He can write, you know ; he is well reviewed, always in the intelligent and sometimes even in the popular papers. But in these latter journals his reviewers have been wont to lament his one-sided, his unbalanced, view of life, for Peregrine belongs—or belonged before this last book—to the every-prospect-pleases-but-man-is-vile school of thought. It was his habit to write ironic little masterpieces, brief, beautiful, but bitter books showing, with real power and in lovely English, the general repulsiveness of humanity, how little hope there is for it and how much meanness occurs in even its best specimens ; all this against an exquisitely painted background.

His latest novel, the one of which I began by speaking, opened in the same way, inducing in the reader a contempt (according to Peregrine, of course, a salutary contempt) for everybody and everything, and making one suspect every

butcher's boy and tram conductor (perhaps justly) of the darkest sexual perversions.

And then in the middle there was a sudden change. It was not that Peregrine dimmed his former piercing insight by donning rose-coloured spectacles; his vision was just as unblinking, his descriptions as sardonically accurate, as ever; but a note of hope seemed somehow to creep into his account of what he saw. It was as though, mixed up with all the villainess and meanness, the filth, the egoistic motive, which Peregrine saw so abundantly about him, he had discovered one or two—I won't say one or two white flowers of blameless lives, for that would be going altogether too far: where could one hope to find a life blameless throughout?—but one or two generous impulses, one or two motives and actions which deserved respect.

To my mind his work gained immeasurably from this realisation on the writer's part that there are two elements in human nature, two motives in life, of which self is only one. Inextricably mingled these elements may be, doubtful their relative value may be, but two there are in each human being; and to deny this in favour of either element, or romantically to allot one element to one person and another to another in the old hero-villain style, is to deny an eternal truth, shirk the real problem of life, and—to descend to a lower level—prevent oneself from achieving first rank in any art.

I reviewed Peregrine's book on these lines at some length, and amused myself by pointing out the precise page on which I imagined I had discovered the change in his philosophy to have taken place.

The morning the notice appeared he rang me up.

"You're a better critic than I thought," he began.

"Thank you for nothing," I said, not too pleased.

"You've more penetration than I gave you credit for," he went on, with a note in his voice, as though he believed



himself to be saying something handsome, which I admit annoyed me.

"That doesn't do *your* penetration much credit," said I.

"What? Oh, I see," he said, and laughed. "Well!" He paused.

I thought I saw that he had rung me up to talk, not about my criticism, but about his novel. "Your changed point of view—*is* there a story behind it, as journalists say?" I asked.

"More and more penetration!" he replied. "There is."

"Then come round and tell me at once," I said. "It's the only apology I shall accept for your disparaging remarks on my critical powers."

He laughed and rang off without replying; but an hour or two later turned up for lunch, and after a display of diffidence which surprised me in such a very sophisticated (and very brilliant) young novelist, gave me an account of the whole affair.

It appeared that it became necessary, in the course of his novel, for his heroine to undergo a peculiarly shattering, hardening, disillusioning experience of some kind. As a matter of fact, said Peregrine, the whole novel had been planned and begun in order to give him the opportunity of describing a certain love affair which he had in mind, as this hardening and disillusioning experience; but when he came to the point of writing it, the love affair in question wouldn't fit into the novel at all. I laughed a little at this, and Peregrine, after a scowl or two, laughed as well.

"Well, you know how it is," he said with an apologetic air. I agreed feelingly that I knew very well. So some other hardening, etc., experience had to be thought out. Peregrine tried one or two—of course these were laboratory secrets—but they did not work out to his satisfaction; so eventually he decided to be very subtle and scathing about it, and harden

his heroine by merely exposing her to the devastating dreariness of some typical scene of English life.

Eventually he hit upon the original, and possibly rather clever, notion of choosing an ordinary popular seaside resort for his dreary scene, and, without saying anything to anybody, drove himself down to Ignotus-on-Sea for a fortnight.

From the first the place surpassed his expectations. He chose lodgings in a back street, with lace curtains, drawn very close, and a suitable number of aspidistras. The meals alone, he said, would have embittered the life of any young woman fit to be a heroine of his, but if they were not enough, across the road was a sort of stable-cum-garage, the proprietor of which was peculiarly disillusioning.

The man was a great fat lump of flesh, with a very red face, curly grey hair—somehow its curliness was quite obscene, said Peregrine, “and you needn’t suspect me of trying to work the adjective in, I assure you”—and some defect in the formation of his huge red lips which made his speech a slobbering horror. Clad in an old tweed Norfolk jacket, stained khaki breeches, cycling stockings and filthy white tennis shoes, this monstrosity was always stamping about his yard, shouting and swearing at his unfortunate mechanics, and browbeating the more timid of his customers.

Peregrine he promptly cheated of half a crown of his change, besides giving him an oil inferior to the one he paid for. “Very good,” said Peregrine to himself, crossing to his rooms after leaving his car at this garage; “very good indeed. Just what I want, in fact.”

He tried to arrange for a sitting-room which should overlook the garage, failed of this, but secured a bedroom with a garage view, and smiling contentedly, went out to view the beach.

This, too, was just what he wanted. He prowled up and down amid—as *he* said; I should have taken a different view—

the crowd, the noise and the mess of a typical English foreshore, observing the ice-cream carts and the oyster stalls with a sardonic eye, and occasionally retiring behind a bathing van to make a quiet note or two in an old red pocket-book. (For Peregrine was not a *poseur*, you know ; at least, not much of one ; he did not *want* people to know he was a writer.)

The sticky children who grew red in the face with quarrelling over a spade, the grandmamas who enjoyed their oysters in uncomely fashion, the husbands who had come out of the bar perhaps hardly soon enough—Peregrine saw them all ; and he noticed with especial glee the silly antics of the screaming, giggling bathers. Yes, upon the whole he was very well satisfied with Ignotus-on-Sea ; it was delightfully inferior. And then, suddenly, he discovered its crowning imbecility—the circus.

At first he did not know what it was when, in a rather deserted corner of the shore, he came upon a score or so of empty deck-chairs arranged in a circle round some small wooden objects like inverted plant-pots. What on earth is all this, thought Peregrine, looking about him ; and seeing no answer to his question, after a little hesitation drew back one of the rickety chairs and sat down. Immediately there appeared from behind a nearby van a painted old hag.

I winced.

"Well, she *was* a painted old hag," Peregrine defended himself. "Blowsy and crumpled, with untidy peroxide hair, clad in a dirty mauve dress which was much too tight for her."

"Peregrine, I don't want to hear all these horrors," I cried.

"You must," said Peregrine, setting his jaw grimly, "or you won't see the point of the story. Besides, what's the use of pretending such people don't exist ? They *do*."

I sighed. "Go on," I said resignedly.

The hag, wreathing her painted face into smiles in Peregrine's direction, clapped her hands so that her bracelets

jingled, and out came two dirty little ragamuffins in tattered finery, with torn red sashes round their waists, and began to turn somersaults, walk about the tumbled sand on their hands, and perform other such unsophisticated gymnastics.

They were boy and girl, about thirteen or so, said Peregrine ; they looked hungry and unhappy, and had no personal attractions that he could see. Peregrine was still in the dark as to the nature of the entertainment when the hag enlightened him by leading into the circle an old white horse. "Oh !" thought Peregrine, "I see. This is a circus, and here the ring ; I am the spectator and that horse a circus horse."

The horse was so much too large for the ring that when, under the hag's direction, it galloped round, dodging the plant-pots in the traditional style, it seemed to be waltzing. It was soon blown, and stood still, its old sides heaving. The hag then, speaking to it in a vicious undertone, urged it to do some trick with its forelegs ; it did not move, so she struck its knees slightly with a switch she carried. Now it pawed one old hoof slowly up and down ; the hag took the opportunity to ask it, quickly, questions of an arithmetical kind.

The horse informed Peregrine that one and one are two, and two and two four, and then retired gratefully to its shade behind the van. The children re-emerged, and did a dance, the feebleness of which had to be seen to be believed, said Peregrine. Then came the *pièce de résistance*, the star turn of the affair.

The hag tripped into the ring followed by five small dogs. There was an old white terrier, short-sighted but sagacious ; a smooth black dog in a red coat, a brown "pom" with a huge green bow, and two young white mongrel dogs of a terrierish breed, who careered about, upset the other dogs, declined to walk on their hind legs or jump sticks or remain perched on their boxes or do anything that the hag wished them to do—which, said Peregrine, vexed her greatly, so that she screamed

at them and struck at them with her switch. Peregrine now found the she-child beside him, proffering a filthy cap ; he put in a coin and walked away, feeling that his new novel was going to be splendid.

"Was that all you felt ?" I inquired.

Peregrine gave me a quick glance. "Oh, no," he said airily. "I thought also that this unpleasing, this repulsive ensemble was what circus life really is. I thought I should like to show the people who write novels about circus life, all footlights and romance and glamour, this particular circus. 'Quaint poesy, and real romance of war,' you know."

"I know," I said. "But——"

"Also," continued Peregrine, "I felt confirmed in my view of the innate repulsiveness of human life."

"Did you, indeed ?" I said.

"Yes," said Peregrine firmly. "I did."

And he continued to feel thus confirmed for several days, during which the novel progressed simply admirably. He got up late, while he dressed, observed the garage proprietor's horrid rages, then worked hard most of the day : in the evening he went down to the shore, and having watched a performance of the circus, returned to his rooms and wrote most of the night.

His two stimuli never failed him ; they roused him to hate and scorn of the human race twice a day as punctually as clock-work. And then one day——

"Well ?" I said.

Peregrine shuffled his feet about.

"Come, no shirking," said I.

Well ! It appeared that one afternoon the divine inflatus kept him working beyond the appointed hour, and by the time he reached the shore the circus was slowly leaving it. He was feeling rather stale and very much in need of stimulation, and the thought of having to do without the circus provoked

him. So much did it provoke him, apparently, that he presently found himself following the wretched little *cortège* along the streets.

The hag led the horse, upon which were loaded the little wooden stands and the old white dog ; the children trailed miserably behind, the other four dogs sometimes getting lost and having to be summoned shrilly, sometimes yapping at their heels. The horse hung its head in the immensity of its fatigue, the hag jerked at its bridle. Repulsive, thoroughly repulsive, thought Peregrine ; the novel will be good to-night.

And then, all of a sudden he found himself entering his own back street, the street he looked on as he dressed, the garage street. He could hardly believe his eyes at first, but with each step he grew surer, until at last he actually stood before the open garage gates, watching the circus trail across the yard. The hag, the children, the horse and the five dogs all vanished into the ramshackle stable at the far end, while Peregrine stared. In a moment the children came flying out together, then the hag followed slowly ; the animals were evidently to stay within.

When the hag, muttering to herself and shaking her penny bracelets, had passed Peregrine and vanished, limping, down the road, Peregrine approached the garage proprietor and awaited his attention.

Presently the man finished the shouting match in which he was engaged, turned, thrust his red face angrily into Peregrine's, and slobbered :

"What *d'you* want ?"

"I just wished to enquire," began Peregrine in his most precious tones, "whether the lady with the circus horse is a relative of yours or no ?"

At this the garage proprietor lost his never very secure temper. He shouted profane remarks at Peregrine, and showed an inclination to stamp upon his toes.

"I gather," said Peregrine when he had finished, "that the answer is in the negative."

"You're right there," said the man feelingly. "Now what d'you want? D'you want your car?"

"How much does she pay you a week for the stabling?" demanded Peregrine.

"What d'you want to know for?" said the proprietor suspiciously.

"Well, I just——" began Peregrine.

"She pays nowt, if you want to know," burst out the man loudly, evidently unable to suppress a long-standing grievance any longer. "Nowt. And there they are taking up the stable, and eating their heads off in corn and dog-biscuit, and barking and yapping and what-not fit to break your head open, all for nowt. She's stranded, that's what she is, and likely to go on being stranded as far as I can see. She hasn't paid me a penny for six weeks, damn her! Not a penny! So now you know." He turned away with an angry snort.

"Why don't you turn the animals out, then?" demanded Peregrine smoothly.

The garage proprietor swung round and stared at Peregrine, while his red swollen face grew slowly purple. "Look here!" he shouted suddenly. "You be off, you damned young whippersnapper! Who the hell asked you to come round here, I'd like to know, poking your silly beard into things as don't concern you? Turn them animals out! Why, what'd she do with them? And those homeless kids she's trying to keep! Well, I'm damned! See here! You take your car and be off!"

"Well?" I said, as Peregrine said no more.

"Well!" he said, with a queer look. "You're a very penetrating critic, aren't you?"

"Sometimes," said I.

"Pray don't imagine," protested Peregrine earnestly, "that since that little episode I'm inclined to take a *romantic* view of

life. I still don't like tousled peroxide hair and tight mauve dresses and dirt, I don't like beastly little circuses with wretched animals, I loathe men who shout and cheat ; and when those things are there I can't help seeing them. But now I can see something else as well. . . ."

"You may see Parnassus some day," I murmured.

"Oh, don't let's get romantic about it," scoffed Peregrine.



RICHARD CAROL

*The Magic of Hussein*



## THE MAGIC OF HUSSEIN

**H**USSEIN EL SAYED, legs outstretched and tarboosh askew, dozed pleasantly with one eye open below the stuffed owl that had made his shop in Sharia Aziz known from Assiut to Aboukir. To the Arab the owl is no bird of wisdom ; it is a bird of ill omen. Yet this specimen, which had come stuffed with all its strange potency from London, was worth its weight in gold.

Indeed, a marvellous bird this owl ; but, as he half dozed, Hussein, the monger of magic, gave no thought to its miraculous powers. Truth to tell, he gave no thought to anything. The July sun blazed blindingly on the Cairene pavement : it was very pleasant to be in the shade, unlike those poor devils who wandered by, unlike that poor devil who, with blue striped galabeah escaping like a shrunken nightshirt from the tight embrace of a light grey, narrow-waisted overcoat, had passed and repassed the shop of Hussein el Sayed no fewer than five times.

The first four times Hussein had seen him pass and repass without noting it, but the fifth time Hussein opened his other eye. Suddenly he realised the other four times, realised that this young man was either a fool mazed by the sun or a stranger who had come to see him and feared to enter. Hussein uncrossed his legs, rose to his feet and stepped casually across the path of the young man as he hesitantly approached the shop for the sixth time.

“It is hot walking in the noonday sun,” said Hussein el

Sayed easily. "Why not come within the shade of my humble shop and amuse thine eyes in the contemplation of my poor wares?"

The young man started nervously, stammered his thanks, and followed Hussein into his shop. Hussein stepped across the narrow booth and held aside a tapestried curtain. The stranger paused a moment, as if beginning to doubt the wisdom of his first hardihood, then suddenly stumbled through. The curtain fell heavily behind him.

"It is cooler in here, my friend," said Hussein, waving the stranger to a galley couch. "And quieter."

For a minute he watched the young man as he looked wonderingly round the strange den, saw the nervous working of his hands, and turned away carelessly to pick up a piece of black stone strangely mottled with green. He turned it over absently in his long fingers till he sensed the other's attention.

"A strange piece, my friend," murmured Hussein. "From the Isle of the Elephants."

The young man leaned forward, his eyes fixed eagerly on the stone.

"By chance thou hast spasms of the heart?" inquired el Sayed softly.

The young man shook his head.

"Unpleasant excesses of bile?" suggested Hussein.

Again the stranger dumbly denied.

"Dreams that turn the blood to water, mayhap?"

The head continued its shaking.

"Or does the wind of heaven get into thy bowels?"

The stranger wriggled, but refuted the suggestion. El Sayed sighed. "A thousand pities," he remarked, dropping the stone back on a damascened tray. "A touch of that stone, and such evils were as snow in the summer sun."

For a good minute Hussein looked around, saying nothing,

waiting for the other to reveal his trouble ; but the stranger, like a calf before the executioner, just stared back dumbly. Hussein picked up a string of beads and began to finger them thoughtfully.

"No evil can approach the wearer of these," he remarked casually, "and only ten piastres the string."

The young man displayed no interest. His gaze drooped to the Shiraz on which his feet were resting ; his fingers began again to twist and untwist like writhing snakes. Under his breath El Sayed cursed. The stranger was proving a difficult proposition. What *was* in the young man's mind ? Why had he come to *him* ? No bodily ill assailed him : no fear of evil. Hussein brought down from the wall the dried-up body of an angler-fish ; its wide maw repulsively agape. He contemplated it a moment.

"Strange," he murmured, almost to himself, "that such ugliness should have the power to make the sterile bear." He turned suddenly to the young man. "Allah has blessed thee with a fruitful wife ?" he inquired.

The young man started, and the eyes of Hussein brightened. It had something to do with a wife, then. His patience had not been altogether wasted.

"Thou hast a wife, of course," Hussein remarked ingenuously. "Or two ?"

The young man licked dry lips.

"I was . . . I was thinking about one," he stammered.

Ah !" The exclamation escaped almost silently from El Sayed's shut lips. Then he added thoughtfully : "A wife is good for man—if she be a good wife. Thou hast made the choice ?"

The young man nodded.

El Sayed smiled. "The blessings of Allah on you both. May thy sons be clever and thy daughters beautiful."

The young man wriggled on the couch. "It is not yet

arranged," he burst out, and now his words fell over one another. "That is why I have come here. I have heard of what thou canst do in these matters. It is the father of Habuba."

Hussein nodded with understanding.

"Nothing so troublesome as a father, my friend—until thou art a father thyself. He does not wish thee to have his daughter?"

"No, no. He will have me as a son-in-law, but he would have no less than two camels and one gemuss for his Habuba. Two camels and one gemuss," the young man repeated with all the emphasis of indignation.

Hussein stroked his chin.

"It is a good figure in these times," he admitted thoughtfully, "though I have heard of as much as four camels. This Habuba, thou hast seen her?"

The other nodded. "I have spoken with her often. She would make a good wife."

"But not so good as two camels and one gemuss?" Hussein suggested.

"I offered him two camels, but he is stubborn as the ass whose head is turned from home at sunset."

"And what wouldst have me do?" inquired Hussein.

"I have heard, O Hussein—I wondered if thou hadst something that would restore the mind of the unhappy Ibrahim, her father, to sanity."

"When doubtless he would let thee have the excellent Habuba for two camels," Hussein put in drily.

The young man nodded vigorously. "Something that would not cost very much," he added cautiously.

Hussein slowly inclined his head, sucked his cheeks in against his teeth and began to pace meditatively up and down the room. Suddenly a wry smile touched the corner of his lips and he turned abruptly to the other.

"Thou canst see this Habuba without difficulty? Speak with her?"

The young man nodded. Hussein el Sayed waved his hands.

"Some of the wisdom of Allah has fallen on my unworthy self. Wait here awhile. A cigarette? That box beside thee."

Hussein raised a carpet hanging on the wall and passed from the den into a still smaller room, where a strange assortment of glassware lined the walls, almost hiding them from floor to ceiling.

Bottles of crystal were there and jars of glass tinted blue and green and orange, and phials of slenderest shape, filled each with its own powder. And as he weighed out carefully first from one bottle then from another, the smile that had been flickering round his lips spread into an unconcealed grin. When he had finished he passed silently into the den, seven small paper packets in his hand, his face once more bland and inscrutable.

The young man rose from the couch, and Hussein handed him the seven packets.

"First, my friend, let no one see what I give thee now. Second, tell no one thou hast even seen me. Third, give these seven packets to Habuba the Beautiful and bid her take one of these powders each day for seven days, with the face to the rising sun, while the stomach is still empty after the sleep of night."

The young man looked at the packets, looked at Hussein.

"But it is the mind of the father of Habuba I would change, O Hussein, not the stomach of Habuba."

El Sayed nodded. "And the mind of the father of Habuba *will* change as surely as the trampled scorpion will sting."

"But how, O Hussein, if it is Habuba who swallows the powders?"

Hussein smiled. "My friend, the magician were no magician if he explained his magic."

With a puzzled look on his face the young man began to fumble below his galabeah for his purse.

"How much do I owe thee, O Hussein?" he inquired, almost reluctantly.

Hussein stopped his hand.

"Let it be my pleasure to clean off the rust of misunderstanding and oil the works of matrimony."

The young man's hand abruptly ceased its fumbling, his face broke into a smile of relief.

"Thou art good, O Hussein. May heaven smile on thee."

He tucked the seven packets away, seized the hand of Hussein, touched head and heart and passed through the narrow booth out into the blazing sun. Hussein followed and stood for a moment watching the young man as he hurried away.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Hast thy tongue been forced to taste of the juice of an unripe lemon, O Hussein?"

Hussein turned and saw his friend and neighbour, Mohammed, regarding him with amusement. His expression changed.

"Does even Allah, in all his consideration, my friend," he answered cryptically, "look with pleasure on the man who weighs a wretched mud-wallowing gemuss against that most marvellous and rare of his gifts, a good wife?"

\* \* \* \* \*

A month later the young man returned to the shop of Hussein el Sayed. This time there was no hesitant approach, no nervous passing and repassing. He entered, walked straight up to Hussein.

Hussein did not seem to see the grim look in the young



man's eyes. He smiled on him, took him gently by the elbow and led him through the curtain into the hidden den.

"And the hard heart of Ibrahim softened, my friend? And the brain cleared so that he saw that two camels for his Habuba was only reasonable?"

"Yes, O Hussein," returned the young man. "After seven days his mind changed as swift as is the kick of an ass. I took Habuba as my wife for two camels, quickly lest he change his mind again. I rejoiced, for I knew she was worth more. I had got a wife for two camels better than my brother Ahmed had got for all three camels." The young man's face hardened and his words came through clenched teeth. "But now I know why Ibrahim decided that two camels were enough. Yes, O Hussein, now I know."

El Sayed's face expressed bland surprise.

"Is she not, then, the excellent wife thou hadst thought she would make?"

"She is irritating as the flea-bitten skin, and her temper stings and lashes like the sand-storm."

"The tiger is a charming creature, my friend, until you tie him up."

"I cannot understand it, O Hussein," the young man went on. "I had sworn she was gentle as the lizard. She was. She has changed, O Hussein, she has changed. It is the work of thy magic powders."

Hussein waved his hands. "Thou hast surely forgotten, my friend, that thou wouldst have her for two camels."

The young man's face brightened. "Then it was thy magic changed her, thou canst change her back again, make her for me as she was when her father would have two camels and one gemuss for her?"

Hussein looked doubtful.

"My friend, I am a magician, but thou wouldst have me perform more than magic. Thou canst make the mango fall

from the tree to the ground, but not leap from the ground into the tree again. Still," he added thoughtfully, "I have accomplished stranger things. It *could* be done."

"What would such magic cost?" inquired the other hopefully, his mind on the previous transaction.

El Sayed shook his head. "That, my friend, is the trouble. It will cost you dear even if I take naught for myself but the pleasure of helping to grease the wheels of matrimony."

"About how much, O Hussein?" stammered the young man nervously.

"The ingredients are rare, extremely rare. One moment, my friend." Hussein produced a piece of paper, pencilled some figures, pursed his lips. "My friend," he announced finally, shaking his head, "the ingredients alone total seven gineh."

The young man started. "Seven gineh!" he exclaimed incredulously. "But thou didst charge me nothing last time."

Hussein waved his hand.

"Because thou art my friend I gave myself the pleasure of helping thee : because thou art my friend I am ready to charge thee naught for my magic. But, my friend, I have a wife. I have two sons and three daughters. They must eat. So, though my sympathy revolts, I must turn the deaf ear to its revolting and charge thee the cost of the ingredients."

"But seven gineh!" protested the young man. "It is almost the cost of one gemuss!"

"But thou hast already saved the cost of one whole gemuss," El Sayed put in quietly.

"Then I shall be little better off if I pay you that."

"Just a little," murmured Hussein. "My friend, the ways of Allah are inscrutable. He gives with one hand : he takes with the other. And thou canst always divorce this Habuba with the irritation of the flea and the temper of the sand-storm."

"And waste my two camels?"

El Sayed shrugged his shoulders. "The choice is thine, my friend."

"It is too dear," returned the young man stubbornly.

"Allah smile on thee, my friend," murmured Hussein, as the young man burst angrily from the room.



Three weeks later the young man waited again on Hussein el Sayed. The magic-monger greeted him kindly.

"Thou hast been working in thy hedge of cactus, my friend," he remarked as they passed through the curtain.

The young man looked puzzled: El Sayed smiled.

"That scratch on thy cheek," he explained.

The young man shook his head.

"The name of that cactus is Habuba," he confessed bitterly.

"Hussein, thou must give me the magic to change that woman. Seven gineh, thou saidst?"

Hussein waved his hands.

"Alas, my friend, thou art surely ill-favoured of Allah. Since thy last visit the ingredients of the powders I could make have become so extremely rare that it will cost now eight gineh. Had I foreseen, I should have warned thee, but——" Hussein shrugged his shoulders.

The young man stamped his heel and his hand clenched tight on the arm of the galley couch.

"Eight gineh," he cried, "the full price of a gemuss. It is the madness hath fallen upon thee, O Hussein."

"Perhaps thou art right, my friend. In that case, thou wouldst not trust the magic of one whose mind wandereth with the wind."

Hussein held the curtain aside: the young man rose, took an impulsive step forward, then stopped.

"O Hussein, I must have the magic of which thou hast spoken."

"Thou hast the money here?"

Reluctantly the young man pulled out his purse: reluctantly he extracted, one by one, the eight notes. Hussein took them and disappeared through the concealed door.

In a quarter of an hour he reappeared, seven packets in his hand.

"My friend, thy Habuba must take these, one each even, facing the setting sun, and then no food must pass her lips till the sun has circled and risen again in the east."

"It will change her back?"

Hussein el Sayed nodded. The young man tucked the packets away and passed quickly from the shop. Hussein followed and watched him as he had watched him once before; but this time a smile hovered on his lips.

"It is pleasant," he murmured softly to himself, "pleasant indeed to be the humble oil-can for the machinery of matrimony."

FREDERIC BOUTET

*Lenoir and Keller*



## LENOIR AND KELLER

AS usual, according to custom at dawn, the man came out of his hut, which was built in an angle of an almost inaccessible cliff. He descended to the shore, where his feet crushed the shells. The sun rose on a sombre sea, still troubled by recent storms. Away to the west was another small island suggesting a sentinel. The penguins that made it their home were confused with its rocks. Here and there the sea-birds of this southern sea swept over the waves with harsh cries.

The man regarded the sky, the sea and the birds with a mechanical interest. He sat down on a stone, and then took food out of a sack that he carried. He drank water from a gourd ; and presently smoked a pipe the stem of which was bound up with string. It was the second of May, 1899. As it was an anniversary of his arrival on the island, he decided not to do any work.

He had lived there, isolated from the rest of the world, for the last five years. His name was Lenoir. He was a man of average height, with broad shoulders. He was active and virile. The sun and the rains had so burned and whipped his face that his swarthy skin suggested a mask in which his clear eyes seemed clearer and his white teeth still whiter.

He sometimes spoke to himself in French and infrequently in English, of which he had picked up a smattering in his voyages. His phrases were coloured with sailors' slang. Since the death of the old American who had been with him on this island, he spoke aloud in order not to forget the human voice,

and to give himself the illusion of having someone to share his stark solitude.

A ship called every two years, and in exchange for fresh food and seal-skins he obtained tinned food, tools, and money. He kept this last in an old biscuit-tin, which served as a bank.

He was staring at a seal when his eyes were attracted by something on the sea above which the gulls were wheeling and screeching.

"A boat!" he exclaimed. "Brought here by current. Wonder what's in it? Why don't them gulls leave it be?"

The boat was presently carried ashore. Lenoir paled under his sunburn. Two men lay still at the bottom of the boat. They were evidently sailors. One was unmistakably dead; the other, a fair man of about thirty-two, with a magnificent frame, might still be alive.

With an effort he got the two bodies ashore, then endeavoured to restore the man whose body was not so stone-cold as the other. He rubbed his limbs, poured rum down his throat, and in every way he could think of fought hard for this shipwrecked man's life.

Hard, callous, insensitive, Lenoir was alive to an emotion he had not known before. He had fought for his life on the seven seas, ashore. But never in his bitter experiences had anything seemed so tragic or touching as this fight for a stranger's life on this empty island, with the morning sun in the sky, and the cries of the hovering birds.

At last the man opened his eyes. Lenoir's heart rejoiced. He now knew he would pull the man through. He redoubled his efforts, and soon was able to assist the tottering man to the hut.

"Where am I?" presently asked the man. He spoke English with a guttural accent.

Lenoir told him. They were on an island in the South Seas. This island was nearer to Africa than anywhere else.



"What of my friend, the old Dane?"

"He is dead. I am going to bury him at the foot of the cliff. . . . How did you get here?"

One of the unnumbered tragedies of the sea had brought the stranger to the island. His ship had caught fire. The crew had been driven to the boats. And of the seven who had been in his boat, hunger and thirst had made five mad. They had jumped overboard and been torn to pieces by sharks. But for Lenoir the stranger would have been as dead as the Dane.

This was the first hint of gratitude that the shipwrecked sailor had spoken. It was enough for Lenoir.

"Don't sing about that," he said, shrugging his shoulders. "Didn't risk anything. Couldn't do less."

"Who, what are you?" asked the man, a German named Keller.

Lenoir told him his story, what he did on the island; of the infrequent visits of ships. He had originally come to the island as the representative of a small shipping company. Preferring a solitary life he remained where he was.

"After all," he said, "I'm sick of the world where I was never sure of a meal the next day. I'd had twenty years all over the place before I anchored here. . . . I'm from a village—I've clean forgot its ruddy old name—somewhere near Dunkerque, in France. . . . I was a kid of twelve when my parents died, and I was chucked on the world to sink or swim. I've been everything—sailor, stoker, docker, and chased monkeys and parrots in Brazil. I've been a potman in pubs. I've worked in the mines at the Cape. I've mixed with all sorts . . . all colours. I've done lots of things I shouldn't have done. . . ."

Silent, Lenoir reflected, trying to retrieve from the shadows of the past many half-forgotten memories. A shrug of his shoulders expressed his indifference.

"That's about all I remember," he said presently, half to

himself. "But now I'm here, I'm used to the life. Don't know if I mentioned it, an old Yankee was with me at first. He pegged out. That hit me hard. Very hard. Couldn't get over it for weeks. Seemed as I was the only bloke in the world. But when a ship came I stuck where I am. . . . Where could I go ? What could I get ?"

Then after a very long silence : "Why have I told you all that ? S'pose 'tis 'cause I haven't seen anyone to speak to for donkey's years, d'ye see ! And you want to know all about me. We've got to live it together . . ."

He waited, expecting a similar confidence. Keller was mum.

"What about you, mate !" he said at last.

"Me !" said Keller, shrugging his shoulders. "That's no matter. We're here. That's all there is to it. When I tell you I've had rotten luck, and that for seven ruddy years I've reasons of me own for not wanting to see Europe, you'll p'raps unnerstand. I've nothing more than what I stand up in. No one in the wide, not one single soul cares a damn where I am." As an afterthought : "My world is now here with you, mate."

He got up, looked around him and repeated :

"It's here."

Lenoir, in his turn, rose to his feet.

"Seems to me that for the present you and me is fixed up for good ; for bad. Me and You. You and Me. 'Tis the same. Swear to me we'll be pals."

They swore to be pals, and solemnly shook hands. They had made a sacred pact.

From then the days rolled by in a stark, endless monotony, varied only by the changes of the seasons and the weather, and the daily necessities. They rarely spoke of their old lives, the lives they had almost forgotten. Lenoir was more than content. He was no longer alone. He was no longer the victim of the boredom that sometimes had seized him.

The two men got on well together. Their mutual under-

standing was perfect. They never fell out or were separated. They saved each other's lives many times. They nursed each other when they were ill. All their few goods were held in common. They fought together against hunger, and saved each other from drinking too much of the rum. Nothing interrupted their friendship.

Ships arrived at intervals of two or three years. They anchored near the island, and trafficked with "Lenoir Keller and Co." This notion was Lenoir's. He said it made them appear more important. And neither of the men dreamed of working their passage back to the Old World ; the Old World which was now strange to them ; and where they had suffered from all its sorrows and from all its imperfections. Whereas now, for them, memories had been lost in this island of peace ; in the shadow of unvarying days.

Neither of them knew more of the world than what they formerly had seen. Slowly created ties held them on this spot, near to the sea, under the wide sky, lost in this wild and peaceful isolation, where they had grown bent, with hairs that were grey, both occupied with the urgent necessities which had brought them together long, long ago.

Without knowing why, without taking the trouble to ask, they were happy, content. And after the fret and the work of the day, when they had eaten their evening meal, they lay side by side in the hut and smoked their pipes in the light of the lamp. They never spoke. They had nothing to say. Their existence had identified their ideas, their thoughts. It was as though the two men were one.

They had been on the island seventeen years. It was nearly three years since they had spoken to anyone other than themselves. It was Lenoir who, on a morning in June, saw a ship anchored out in the bay. He returned to the hut and called to his friend.

Keller appeared and stared at the ship. A boat was being rowed in the direction of the island.

"Yankee schooner," said Keller.

He did not say any more. The two men awaited the arrival of the boat, which soon touched the sand. The second mate, a jovial young American, greeted them warmly. He offered them all they might want in exchange for seal-skins, vegetables and water.

He accompanied the two men to their hut, where they chatted while drinking rum.

"You're a darned funny pair of guys," said the American presently. "Don't you want to hear the news?"

"What do we want with news on this island?" replied Lenoir. "News about what?"

"News of the war, of course."

"What war?"

The American gasped.

"Gee! Then neither of you know . . .?"

"How can we know anything! It's years since we've spoken to blokes from a ship."

The American told them at length of all that had happened to the world since August, 1914. He gave the facts clearly, in their sequence, without partiality or enthusiasm. He furnished the dates and particulars of the outstanding battles, of invasions, of the taking of towns, of the torpedoing of ships, of aerial bombardments.

The two men, listening, gaped their astonishment.

His business completed, the American went back to the ship, which steamed away.

The sun was going down in the sky. Lenoir and Keller approached their hut. Both were persistently silent.

"Here's a fine yarn," said Keller suddenly.

Lenoir walked for some moments without replying.

"You're right. We were O.K. here, wanting nixes," he said at last.

"Yes. . . . And all the time in Europe . . . What a business !

All the same, if we were in their shoes, we others . . . What a business ! What's it all for ?”

“What are you talking about—‘we others’ ? . . . You ! . . . YOU ! . . . You're only a German !”

“I *am* a German. . . . What if I am !” exclaimed Keller defiantly.

They stared at each other. A new expression appeared on their faces. An expression that had not been seen before. Something momentous had come between them, something which came from far, far away ; from the end of the world ; from the battlefields, the smoking towns, the desolate fields, the battered villages ; all the sufferings ; all the anguish ; all the vast, unmeasurable mourning.

But the old habit of friendship so held them that, at present, they did not comprehend the confused emotions which arose from a far distant past ; emotions that were all but forgotten, but were now reborn and so stirred within them.

“Worse than '70,” muttered Lenoir. “Bit different now, though.”

“Pah ! All that makes no difference,” said Keller, who tried to smile in spite of the acidity in his voice. “And if Germany wipes out France, that shouldn't stop us from being just the same here.”

“Stop that !” cried Lenoir. “This time it's you who'll get it in the neck.”

“Don't you believe it,” retorted Keller.

They stopped and glared at each other. They were suddenly seized by blind passion. A fury that had nothing to do with their wishes impelled them to fight. Without further words they fell to.

Fiercely, dumbly, they used all their strength.

During some minutes neither had the advantage, but Keller was presently thrown on his back. He got on his feet and made for Lenoir. Not, however, for long. Bounding

back, he felt in his pocket. Then, seeing in his adversary's hand the flash of a blade, Lenoir seized him by the wrist.

The fight, now envenomed, continued. They fell, then rolled on the earth, and uttered hoarse cries. The knife had slipped from Keller's hand, and lay on the ground beside them. Lenoir made a mighty effort and snatched it. His opponent was now at his mercy.

But he did not strike. . . . Releasing the other, who was gasping for breath, he stood up breathless, still grasping the knife.

"Can't do him in," he muttered. "Didn't pull him from death to kill him. . . . And for these seventeen years . . ."

He walked away, then returned towards Keller. The German slowly got on his feet, then lowered his head as he confronted the Frenchman. His face, now livid, expressed shame and anger.

"That's torn it," said Lenoir. "Absolutely torn it. You can have half of everything. You can take the boat. You can hop it to that other island. You can get along there just as well as here. I'll stay here and go to the west of the island. Then we shan't set eyes on each other. . . ."

And then as Keller did not reply, and set about making preparations for departure, he said to himself: "And when, ships pass he'll see them better. . . . After all, I'd like to go back. I want to go to where it all is . . ."

Vague recollections awakened in Lenoir's mind. He saw confused sights which were yet familiar. There was a village by a flat road . . . a child hastening home for his supper . . . a poor little cottage where his mother awaited him. . . . That child was surely himself. . . .

He heard the noise of oars on the sea. Keller was rowing himself to the island.

Lenoir started, stood up. . . . He wanted to call, to make some appeal to Keller, his friend of seventeen years. . . . But, changing his mind, he turned his back, and was silent.

Night came down, blotting out the two separated men.

A. M. PUSHKIN

*The Ace of Spades*





## THE ACE OF SPADES

HERMANN shook hands with himself. He had received a letter giving him the coveted rendezvous, a meeting that should further his desperate plan, and so bring him within reach of an easy fortune.

A young officer in the Engineers, he concealed beneath a cold exterior a flaming ambition, a passionate craving for wealth.

Two or three weeks back, he had heard a strange story from Naroumof, a lieutenant in the Horse Guards.

This story was concerned with Naroumof's grandmother, the Comtesse Anna Fedotovna, a former beauty, and now a redoubtable old lady of eighty-six.

Long ago, she had lost a big sum of money at cards in Paris. After vainly applying to her husband for assistance, she had appealed to the eccentric and notorious Comte de Saint-Germain.

Under a promise of secrecy, and on the condition that she would never play again after she had won back the money, the Comte named three cards which she was to play in succession. The Comtesse had played these three cards, and had more than regained the money she had lost.

Although many had tried to get from her lips the names of these three winning cards, she had held to her promise, with the exception of confiding the secret to a dearly loved son.

This story had haunted Hermann. He could not get it out of his mind. If he could but get acquainted with the Comtesse,

he might, by persuasion or force, obtain from her the secret of the three cards, and so win a large sum of money.

He had taken to watching the town house of the old Comtesse, and here luck had favoured him. He had caught the eye of a handsome young woman seated at a window, a young woman who was presumably the old lady's companion. He had stared until she had dropped her eyes ; but after a minute she had raised them, and then she had blushed.

This was the beginning of a silent courtship which Lisabeta Ivanova, aching to escape from the trying old Comtesse, took seriously.

Then, when she was attending the Comtesse to her carriage, Hermann, on the watch, had saluted her and pressed a note in her hand.

She had read this note on returning from the drive, a note that contained ardent protestations of love. Then, by the hands of a milliner who called at the house, she received frequent letters from Hermann.

These, at last, she answered, with a warmth that waxed with each letter.

She had ultimately given him a rendezvous late at night in the house, at the same time furnishing elaborate instructions on how to get into the place, and what direction to take when inside.

He must take every care to avoid the Comtesse's apartments.

Hermann, like a tiger in sight of its prey, trembled in every limb. He saw himself wealthy, honoured. Somehow or another, he would face the Comtesse, and by fair means or foul, obtain her secret.

It had been arranged that he should seek admission to the house while the Comtesse and Lisabeta were absent at a ball. Everything went according to plan. Instead, however, of seeking the girl's room, he hid himself in the large bedroom of the Comtesse.

In due course, the old lady returned with Lisabeta, and was attended by three old maids of honour to the bedroom. As the Comtesse suffered from insomnia, she did not at once go to bed, but reclined in a chair.

In this room, lit only by the lights before the ikons, the Comtesse looked more dead than alive.

It was not until Hermann confronted her that she appeared really alive.

"You have nothing to fear—nothing whatever," he said in a low even voice. "But it was necessary that I should see you—alone. As I have told you, you have nothing whatever to fear, provided you tell me something that I must know."

The old woman regarded him in silence, and as though she did not understand. Believing she was deaf, he put his lips to her ear and repeated his words. The Comtesse still maintained silence.

"You are able to make me happy for life," he continued, "and in a way that will not cost you anything. . . . For you know the secret of a certain three cards which . . ."

Hermann stopped short. She evidently understood what he meant.

"All that's merely a joke," she said. "I swear to you it was only a joke."

"It was nothing of the sort," he declared, with rising anger. "You gave the secret to one of your sons—your favourite son . . ."

The Comtesse was troubled. She took refuge in apparent stupidity.

"Won't you tell me the three winning cards?" The Comtesse was silent. Hermann fell on his knees.

"If you have ever known love, if you have ever tasted ecstasy, if you have any humanity, I ask, I beseech you, by the love of a husband, the love of a lover, the love of a mother, by everything that is holy in life, to do what I ask. . . ."

"You are old. You have not long to live. But I . . . I, young as I am, I am ready, eager to be responsible for all the sins you may have committed, and to be answerable for them before God, if you will tell me this secret."

The old Comtesse was obstinately silent. Hermann got up from his knees. "Cursed old woman!" he cried, grinding his teeth. "At least I have something that will open your lips."

He brought out a pistol. At the sight of this weapon, the old Comtesse came to life. Her face betrayed fear. Her head shook as though palsied, and as she stretched out her arms to defend herself from the pistol, she suddenly fell back in her chair and was still.

"Don't play the fool," cried Hermann, seizing the old woman's hand. "For the last time, will you, or will you not, tell me those three cards?"

The Comtesse was persistently silent. Hermann perceived she was dead. . . .

Hermann went to Lisabeta's room. He told her everything, including the death of the Comtesse. She burned with shame. She recalled his passionate letters, with their warm protestations of love. She now knew these were false; that all he had wanted was money.

She had been the blind tool of a thief—the murderer of her protectress. She wept bitterly.

Her looks and her tears did not touch this man of iron will. He did not repent of what he had done. He knew no remorse for the death of the Comtesse. He was torn by the thought that the secret he had coveted had permanently escaped him.

The long silence was broken by Lisabeta. "But you are a monster!" she cried.

"There was no question of my killing her," he coldly replied. "The pistol wasn't loaded."

"I must get you out of here," she said. "But you will have to go through the Comtesse's room. I . . . I am afraid."

After giving him a key and the necessary directions, Hermann first entered the room where the old Comtesse still sat in her chair. He stared at her for some time, as though to assure himself of this stark reality, then found his way from the house.

Hermann had returned from the funeral of the Comtesse.

On kneeling beside the body beforehand and regarding its face, it had seemed that one of the eyes had mocked him, then winked. For the rest of the day, he was troubled with a singular depression.

On ordering his dinner in a restaurant, he found himself unable to eat, but drank far more than he usually did. He returned to his rooms in good time. Without undressing, he threw himself on the bed and fell fast asleep.

When he awoke, it was night, and the moonlight was streaming into his chamber. He looked at his watch. It was a quarter to three.

He did not want to sleep any more. He sat on the bed and thought of the old Comtesse. Someone stared through the window, but he paid no attention. And presently he heard someone open the door of the sitting-room.

Believing that this must be the caretaker, who often came back drunk in the small hours, he took no notice, until he heard an unfamiliar footstep. Then . . . then the bedroom door opened, and a woman all dressed in white came into the room, and advanced to the foot of the bed.

Hermann saw the old Comtesse.

"I have come to you in spite of myself," she said. "I am compelled to answer your appeal. . . . Three . . . seven

. . . ace will win all you want, if played in that sequence. But . . . but you must only play one card in twenty-four hours. And after, you must never touch cards again. As for my death, I will forgive you only on the condition that you marry Lisabeta Ivanovna, my companion."

The old Comtesse then quitted the room. Hermann remained dumbfounded, stunned. Later, on going to the sitting-room, he found the caretaker asleep on the floor and the key turned in the lock of the door.

Hermann went to the gambling-rooms kept by the famous wealthy Tchekalinski. He was introduced by Naroumof, from whom he had learned the strange story of the cards.

In one of the rooms, Tchekalinski presided, as banker at a table where faro was being played. (In this game each player is dealt a card by the banker. The banker then deals two other cards on to the table. If the player's card is a duplicate of one of the two the banker has laid down, the player receives double the money he has staked.)

When Hermann was presently introduced, he asked if he could take one card.

Tchekalinski graciously gave the required permission. Naroumof laughingly congratulated Hermann for thus taking it into his head to gamble, and wished him good luck.

"There you are!" said Hermann, after having written a figure on the card he had taken.

"How much?" asked the banker, blinking his eyes. "My sight isn't quite what it was."

"Forty-seven thousand roubles," replied Hermann.

All heads were raised at hearing this sum. Naroumof thought his friend had gone mad.

"Rather a large stake," said the banker, with his eternal smile. "Of course, I don't doubt your ability to pay if you

lose, but I rather wish you'd back your card with some money."

Hermann brought out a note. After glancing at this, the banker placed it on the card. He dealt two cards, a ten on the right, and a three on the left.

"I win," said Hermann, showing his card, a three. A murmur of astonishment arose from the crowded table. For a moment the banker looked glum, but soon recovered his smile.

"Shall I settle up now?" he asked the winner.

"If you wouldn't mind."

The banker, producing a pocket-book, took out some bank-notes and handed these over to Hermann, who pocketed his winnings and then left the table. He drank some lemonade, and went home to bed.

The next evening he returned to the gaming-house and sought the table where Tchekalinski was banker. The punters greeted Hermann with respect and made a place for him.

Hermann awaited a new deal, and then took a card on which he staked not only 47,000 roubles, but also what he had previously won. The banker started to deal. He dealt a knave to the right and a seven to the left.

Hermann showed a seven.

There was a general gasp of astonishment, and the banker looked uncomfortable. Counting out 94,000 roubles, he gave them to Hermann, who coolly accepted them, and then took his leave.

He came again the next evening. On seeing him, the players deserted their games and crowded round the principal table. They wanted to see if Hermann's astonishing luck would hold. Tchekalinski turned pale on recognising him, but somehow managed to smile as he braced himself for the play.

Each took a new pack of cards. Tchekalinski cut and, selecting a card, he covered this with a pile of bank-notes. It was like preparing for a duel. He began to deal. His hands trembled. He threw a queen on the right and an ace to the left.

"The ace wins," said Hermann, showing his card.

"Your Queen has lost," replied the banker, triumphantly.

Hermann trembled violently. Instead of an ace he saw before him a queen of spades. He could not believe the evidence of his eyes. He could not understand how he had made a mistake.

His eyes were fixed on this fatal card. It seemed to him that the queen of spades winked, and looked at him with a jeering smile. He was stricken with horror at seeing that there was an uncanny resemblance between this ace of spades and the dead Comtesse. . . .

"Curse the old woman!" said Hermann, terrified, to himself.

Tchekalinski, using a rake, heaped up his winnings. Hermann seemed turned into stone. He did not move for quite a long time. When he at last left the room, conversation began.

"What a punter!" commented the players.

Hermann went mad, and is in an asylum. He does not answer if spoken to, but continually repeats to himself, "Three—Seven—Ace! Three—Seven—Queen!"

Lisabeta is happily married.



C. PATRICK THOMPSON

*The Shuttlecock of the Ritz-Ritz*



## THE SHUTTLECOCK OF THE RITZ-RITZ

ON the glassed-in roof of the Ritz, Kinroyd, of the Air Police, leaned against a slim girder and watched the alternating lifts taking passengers and baggage up to the landing-stage thirty feet above the Customs Office. From this position he could observe the faces that passed upward while himself remaining unnoticed.

Simultaneously with the booming of the five-minute gong overhead came the splutter and bang of high-power motors starting up. Kinroyd frowned. The explosive roar settled quickly into a steady hum. Kinroyd took out his watch. Three minutes later he moved away from his post and entered a lift displaying the "Up" sign. The engine-note above was now a dull roar; a mighty draught churned by the propellers was whistling up there on the stage, and the slender girder towers sustaining the flat platform were quivering.

At that instant the other lift shot out of its shaft at speed. Kinroyd had a fleeting glimpse of a pale, sunken face under a crushed-in black hat, and his brow smoothed. He took a final glance at his watch. It wanted one minute to the half-hour.

He murmured: "You are cutting it rather fine to-day, my friend. All right," he added to the liftman. "Go down."

He walked rapidly out of the hotel and jumped into a narrow white racing car. The traffic light showed green; but, held suddenly by the imperative hand of a point-duty constable, the stream of westward traffic ceased to flow while Kinroyd attained St. James's Street by the simple process of

reversing speed and spinning round across the breadth of Piccadilly. His progress was marked by similar traffic jams at every point past, for the white car had priority over every other vehicle in London. Entering the Air Police Department in Whitehall, Kinroyd tapped on the door of a room bearing the notice :

SIR THEODORE BANE,  
Chief Commissioner.

A very tall man with angular and prominent features looked up and greeted him with a quiet, "Hello."

"Good morning, Sir Theodore." Kinroyd perched himself on a corner of the big desk. "About your friend who's so fond of the Ritz-Ritz."

"Ah, yes ; the Shuttlecock, I think you called him. Well, 'to be or not to be ?' "

" 'To be,' I'm glad to say, although it was a close shave."

"He has flown on five days, then ?"

"Yes."

"Good." He smiled at Kinroyd, having a certain affection for this young man taken from a professorial chair at Oxford for the post of psychological specialist in his department. "Now you will have something to amuse yourself with."

Kinroyd had had nothing to do for two months. There had been in that time no cases which could not be tackled by departmental routine methods and the departmental specialists in facts. Kinroyd was outside both ; a psychologist, a specialist in intangibles, curious not about clues but about the cause and meaning of human action. In the sphere of aerial crime, where material clues are inevitably not so frequent as in the sphere of terrestrial crime, this man, whom Scotland Yard would have ridiculed, was invaluable.

The present enigma, singular as it was, appeared to offer

no prospect of danger or excitement. The detective permanently stationed on the Ritz-Ritz route had noted in the "unusual occurrence" column of his weekly report that a man, surnamed Levin, Christian names James Henry, aged fifty-three, of independent means and apparently respectable character, had for the past six weeks travelled from London to Paris on the 10.30 (morning) machine one day and returned from Paris to London on the 10.30 (morning) machine the next. His passport was in order, but his routine, in view of the fact that he was stated to follow no occupation, appeared to call for investigation. For flying, when the freshness of the sensation has worn off, is monotonous beyond conception.

The Chief had referred the matter to Kinroyd and Kinroyd had decided to give the mysterious traveller three chances to confirm the detective's report ; and the mysterious traveller, in flying Paris-wards from the London Ritz on Monday, on Wednesday and on Friday, had successfully confirmed it.

"I shall go to Paris," said Kinroyd, and slipping off the desk and picking up his hat, he resumed the formal manner of a subordinate to his superior.

The Chief nodded and raised a lazy finger in acknowledgment.

Kinroyd went up in the lift to the hangars on the Police Stage which roofed in part of Whitehall. His machine, a single-seater racing type, lean like his car, enormously engined, was run out and started up. He rushed up into the sky like a rocket, flattened and opened full out. Over Surrey and Sussex, over the Channel and the northern French coast he moved at a speed of over 400 miles an hour.

The powerful Ritz-Ritz express, with thirty minutes start, he passed north of Amiens, and landed on the flat superstructure of the Paris Ritz with ten minutes to spare.

Leaving his machine to be pushed into one of the little private hangars fringing the north and west edges, he went

down to the Customs office. On first entering the Customs office one perceived merely a highly luxurious lounge, the terminus of lifts, but on further examination one discovered the two State officials seated behind a mahogany counter at the far end. Kinroyd greeted them amiably, and while they conversed the air liner arrived and began to discharge the contents of its fuselage.

Mr. Levin, more haggard than ever, and accompanied by a porter carrying a single suit-case, was among the first to emerge from the lifts. The porter brought the bag over to the counter. Mr. Levin, without giving him a glance, passed with the assurance of one in familiar surroundings through the swing doors admitting to the hotel foyer.

Kinroyd noted that the Customs official bestowed only a cursory glance at the bag's contents.

"You are acquainted with that gentleman, I see," he remarked.

"Yes," replied the official. "He is a regular visitor every other day. You will not find him of interest to you, Mr. Kinroyd."

"Why do you think so?"

"*Nom d'un chien!* I have looked into his bag two-score times. I know it by heart."

Kinroyd turned upon the porter so abruptly that the man instinctively took a step back.

"And what do you think about it, my friend?"

He still spoke in French. The man, who had been casting furtive sidelong glances, stared at him suddenly.

"*Non comprendo.*"

"But do you not speak French?"

"*Non comprendo,*" repeated the porter stubbornly, and, seizing the bag, he hurried off.

"An Italian porter at the Ritz who does not speak French," remarked Kinroyd.

"But what does it matter, the tongue? They fetch and carry. It is all that is required."

"And yet," said Kinroyd, "he understood what we were saying, and was not at all pleased."

The Frenchman smiled incredulously. Kinroyd continued, imperturbably:

"When a man who declares nothing is concealing a dutiable article, you know at once, do you not?"

The official nodded seriously. Here was a psychological trait within his comprehension.

"It is the instinct," he said. "It comes with practice at the work."

"Exactly," said Kinroyd. "The instinct, as you call it. That was how I knew the porter understood. But why he should pretend that he did not understand, I do not know."

He nodded and strolled away to the reception desk, where the sight of him was sufficient to draw an ambassadorial personage in haste from an inner sanctum.

"It is nothing, my dear monsieur," assured Kinroyd, smiling, and taking his hand. "A little matter of personal curiosity, that is all."

"Ah, Mr. Kinroyd, you relieve me. I confess the sight of you terrifies me. You are like fate. You move in the track of fearful affairs. The hotel has barely recovered from what transpired on the occasion of your last appearance here. But will not monsieur come into my office? We can discuss there . . ."

Ten minutes later Kinroyd was standing with his foot on the rail of the magnificent bar on the first floor. He could get no nearer to Mr. Levin than that, for all the rooms and suites on the first three floors were occupied. So he sipped a cocktail, and observed with interest the technique of the room service. Every few minutes a waiter would pop in, snap an order, seize the filled glasses, and fly out as if the devil were on

his tail. Kinroyd expressed surprise at the high velocity of these performances.

"It is our pride, monsieur, to serve a drink to any suite on this floor in fifty seconds," said the barman. "On the floor above they take seventy-five."

"But, surely," protested Kinroyd, "people drink in the bar or the lounge and not in their rooms? There is a bar on every floor."

"They are all suites on this floor," replied the barman, "and a great many people take meals and drinks in their suites. They pay for a private sitting-room. Why should they not use it?"

"True," agreed Kinroyd. "I suppose that Mr. Levin is one of those who like their money's worth?"

Apparently the chance remark disturbed the barman. He stopped in the act of pouring the limejuice, grenadine and rum for a Bacardi. His black eyebrows contracted and he darted a strange, fierce and most un-bartenderly glance at Kinroyd.

"You are Italian, by the way?" pursued Kinroyd gently.

"I, monsieur? I am French."

"Ah, I should scarcely have thought it," said Kinroyd. "But here comes your friend."

The agile waiter dashed in as he spoke, and rapped out his orders in a series of staccato abbreviations which would have been unintelligible to anyone but a barman. As he lifted his replenished tray the foot of Kinroyd appeared to slip on the rail, and he stumbled against the waiter. The latter staggered, tilting the tray, and with a resounding crash all the glasses slid together and emptied themselves over his chest.

"*Diable !*" exclaimed the waiter, bathed in a variety of intoxicants.

"*Dolce angelo mio !*" cried the man behind the bar.



"For a Frenchman, you have a strange taste, in oaths," said Kinroyd to him mildly.

He paid the damage, soothed the waiter's feelings with a twenty-franc note, and left the bar. In the corridor he paused a moment outside Mr. Levin's door, and then descended to the restaurant and told the *maître* that he had a message for the waiter at Mr. Levin's table. A swarthy menial darted over in response to a beckoning finger.

"What is the set lunch to-day?" asked Kinroyd.

"*Carte ? La crème de Pottron, Délices de Sole Véronique, Carré d'Agneau Châtelaine,*" began the man, with an astonished look.

"So," Kinroyd cut him short. "But you should try to disguise your Italian accent better than that," and he turned on his heel and went out into the foyer. Taking out his card-case, he selected a card which bore simply the inscription "Mr. J. T. Kinroyd," and calling a page, instructed him to take it up to Mr. Levin. In a minute the boy returned. Mr. Levin could see no one.

"He did not even ask who I was?"

"*Non, monsieur.*"

Kinroyd replaced his case, entered the lift, and got out at the first floor. Approaching Mr. Levin's door, he knocked. No voice within bade him enter, but after some delay the door was opened by Mr. Levin himself. The man had the appearance of one stricken by a mortal malady, but he was composed.

"Yes?" he asked, evidently mistaking Kinroyd for someone connected with the hotel.

"I should like the pleasure of five minutes' conversation with you," said Kinroyd.

"What do you wish to speak to me about?" inquired Mr. Levin sharply.

"Italians," said Kinroyd.

Mr. Levin's face became distorted by a violent spasm of rage. "You devil!" he ejaculated in Italian, and slammed the

door. Kinroyd, who was not astonished at this reception, turned away, and found a waiter standing beside him. They exchanged a prolonged stare, cool on Kinroyd's part, sinister on the waiter's.

"A fourth Italian, I perceive," said Kinroyd pleasantly.

After this encounter he repaired to the airplane stage, had his machine brought out, and flew back to the London Ritz. He wished to ascertain whether the peculiar conditions he divined in the Paris hotel were duplicated in London.

A brief interview with the hotel manager secured for him the table reserved in the restaurant for Mr. Levin every other evening. His waiter at dinner that night had a suave, impenetrable face, and a perfect French accent. Kinroyd took one glance at him and decided that this was the strongest character he had as yet had to deal with. He said, as bearded Colchesters were placed before him :

"I should leave Levin alone, if I were you."

The bait failed. The man swept off a crumb, moved the hock glass closer, bowed, and passed on to another table. Kinroyd smiled and ate his oysters. When the waiter came for the empty plate, he said :

"You made a mistake, my friend. You should have replied. By remaining silent, you gave yourself away."

"Who are you ?" murmured the waiter, bending an attentive and deferential ear.

"A student of psychology," said Kinroyd.

"Mind your own business," said the waiter softly, "or you will regret it." And with another touch to the table appointments and a slavish obeisance, he glided away.

Kinroyd grinned. The enigma was no longer completely an enigma, and yet the core of it eluded him.

After dinner he called at Sir Theodore's flat. That night he slept peacefully in the bed at his London apartment. Early the next morning he was in Paris again, and at ten o'clock

he was talking to the pilot of the Ritz-Ritz 10.30 machine. The pilot was complaining that he had had only twelve minutes' notice of a change in the schedule for that day. The 9.30 machine had gone off on time ; but, beginning with the 10.30, the remainder of the day machines were to start half an hour late.

"Aren't you going to post up the change in the Customs office?" inquired Kinroyd.

"No, I shan't bother. The steward can tell the passengers as they arrive."

The lifts emitted to the giant airplane by way of two short covered gangways, but the unbreakable glass panels in the fuselage walls allowed a clear view of the interior, where passengers could be seen taking their places. Presently Kinroyd excused himself and strolled round to the front of the machine. A flexible metal ladder dangled from the open door of the pilot's cockpit. Kinroyd sprang up it, pushed back a sliding panel and entered the long saloon. Mr. Levin was in the act of sinking into a seat beside one of the great windows. He looked up with a start when Kinroyd touched his arm.

"We start half an hour late to-day."

The innocent remark clearly had some frightful significance for Mr. Levin. He jumped as at an electric shock and turned blue about the lips.

"It goes at eleven, then?" His voice was an almost inaudible whisper of fear.

"Yes."

"It is too late," muttered Mr. Levin. He stood up with a jerky movement. "I must go by another airplane. Where can I find another airplane?"

"At Le Bourget Aerodrome. It is a half-hour's run by car, and it will take you ten minutes to get a car."

Mr. Levin fell back. He lay limp, mouth open, eyes staring, arms hanging over the sides of his chair. Kinroyd

saw that some unknown terror was torturing him to the limits of human endurance. He said, bending over him :

"But I have a 'plane here."

"Get me away by half-past ten," exclaimed Mr. Levin, starting up, "and I will give you a thousand pounds."

"Come, then." Kinroyd led the way out through the cockpit panel. "My machine is in that hangar. But," he added "I will take you only on one condition."

"I have English bank-notes here for a thousand."

Kinroyd shook his head.

"No. I want to know, first, why you fly to Paris from the Italians in London, only to fly back again to London from the Italians in Paris ; and, second, why it is so vital that you should leave both cities by 10.30 ? Tell me this, and I will fly you to London in forty minutes without charge."

"Oh !" cried the other, turning a flaming glance on him. "I recognise you ! It was you who came to my door. Who are you ? What do you want ?"

"I have told you," replied Kinroyd, with a slight shrug. "Time is getting short, Mr. Levin ; you have only two minutes now. I am no one you need fear. You may regard me merely as an inquisitive person."

"I have not time to tell you !" cried Mr. Levin. "I will tell you on the way across. We have only a minute . . ."

"You might forget as soon as we started. Tell me now. A minute one way or the other won't matter."

"But it will !" shrieked Mr. Levin with violence. "It will ! It means my life. Where is your machine ? Bah ! You are playing with me, you dog !"

He sprang at Kinroyd's throat, but the slim young scientist easily thrust his decrepit assailant back.

"You are wasting time," said he coldly. "See, it's half-past ten."

Mr. Levin gazed at the big white clock face up on the gong

tower. He dropped his hands in a gesture of ineffable despair.

"It has come," he muttered, as if to himself. "It is the end. I must die."

Turning to Kinroyd, he said in a calm voice :

"I do not know who you are, or why you pursue me, but I will satisfy your curiosity. It shall be my last act on earth. Fifteen years ago I was secretary of the Associated Waiters and Hotel Servants of Italy. This was in the unquiet days before Mussolini. The society was accumulating an extraordinary fund to finance a general strike. At the last moment we withdrew the money from the bank, for fear it would be seized by the authorities.

"The President and I were fascinated by the mighty pile of notes. We fled secretly, and got away to England with the entire treasure. Without funds the Society was easily crushed ; its members were scattered. But a vendetta was sworn against us, and within a year every Italian waiter in America, in England, and on the Continent was pledged to hunt us down. The meshes of that net were too small for us to escape it. We were discovered, and seized, he in his house, I in my room at an hotel, and taken to a secret headquarters in London.

"For three months we lay in chains in a cellar, and then we were tried by picked delegates and condemned. Instead of killing us at once, however, they made Wandering Jews of us. We were allowed to keep the money we had stolen and to go free. Only, we were told, that we must go alone always, that we must live in hotels always, and that we must never stay in one place longer than twenty-four hours. I wept tears of joy when I was released. I resolved to change my name, become a naturalised Englishman, obliterate the past. Life seemed so unspeakably precious and my punishment so easy and magnanimous. . . .

"I was soon disillusioned, however, and I suffered all the torments of the damned. To know loneliness, terror and the

apprehension of death ! Never to have a companion, a friend, or a home ! To have to go on like that, to go on, ill or well, without pause or respite, and to see the implacable face of a sworn and deadly enemy everywhere one turns every day of one's life ! Can you imagine for an instant what that means ? Have you ever fled in nightmare through a dark forest, full of hidden snakes ? My life has been like that.

"Five years ago my companion in crime was executed. He contracted a fever in Seville, but he dragged himself from his bed at the end of the day. He had not reached the outskirts of the town before he collapsed. They had followed him like wolves and on the stroke of the twenty-fourth hour they stabbed him in the breast and in the throat.

"I held on for two more years, and then I conceived the idea of travelling only between two cities. That promised more rest ; but after I had tried it a month they intervened. I might live in two cities, they said, only if at least a hundred miles separated one from the other. So I had to abandon the idea, until one day they started the regular air service on the Ritz-Ritz route.

"At length the heaviest burdens were lifted from my existence. I suffered still, but my life was endurable. Twenty-two hours out of every twenty-four I was at rest, and free. Now—it is the end. I have been in one place twenty-four hours and twenty-five minutes. They will kill me, and I shall be glad to die. For now that it has come, I realise that death is nothing, and the fear of death everything. There—look ! —there is the shadow of my death."

Kinroyd looked in the direction of his pointing finger. The lift attendant had come round the corner of his lift and was regarding him with a peculiar little smile. Behind him, holding a broom, the porter whom Kinroyd had first suspected stood motionless, sweeping invisible dust backwards and forwards along the smooth floor of the stage, and smiling quietly with

downcast eyes. The five-minute gong had already beaten ; the one-minute strokes now boomed out, presaging the single zero clap. An inferno of wind and sound engulfed the two men by the fringe of little hangars and the two men by the lift shaft.

"BOOM !" The zero signal struck. The whistling propellers flashed into invisibility. Rocking the two-hundred foot machine thundered down the run, quicker, quicker still, and at the edge, with the noise of a tornado hurtling, it shot off into space and rushed steeply upward. The stage attendants and mechanics had gone to their shelters five minutes before (the stage was a dangerous place to be on when the expresses were landing or taking off), and there remained only the four men who were watching one another. The lift attendant drew closer inch by inch, the porter swept his dust diligently in his tracks, and out of the second lift there peered the pale, perspiring face of a man incongruously in evening dress.

All at once Mr. Levin threw up his hand.

"Stop !" he shouted.

The two approaching men stopped without ceasing to smile ; the waiter came right out of the lift.

"I shall escape you, you fools," said Mr. Levin out of the corner of a snarling mouth. "You have imposed your will on me for fifteen years. Now I will impose mine on you. I die in my own way. My curse on you !"

Kinroyd made a sudden grab at him. Mr. Levin eluded it, ran down the narrow passageway between two hangars, and bounded over the rail. Kinroyd sprang to the edge, and saw the falling body rebound from the stone roof coping and continue its terrific plunge. Far below there was a crush of traffic in the broad avenue. In the midst of that crush the erring secretary of the Associated Waiters and Hotel Servants of Italy struck—and vanished.

"Hello," murmured the chief, when Kinroyd came into his office that afternoon. "Has the altered schedule solved the mystery of friend Levin already?"

"It has," soberly replied the student of human motives. "And it has killed him."



ALFRED DE SAUVINIERE

*The Raiser of Spectres*



## THE RAISER OF SPECTRES

**I**T was during the time, a few years back, when the railway crossing the Pyrenees was not yet open.

At that period people in Spain travelled about in those amusing Catalan diligences of epic memory. Very low on their wheels, broad, massive, with a large hood in front to protect driver, conductor, and mayoral, these vehicles, painted in dazzling yellow and bright red, drawn by eight or ten mules decked out and caparisoned beyond all measure, flew like the wind.

This method of travel put us back about fifty years in the century ; we would fain persuade ourselves that we lived in the time of the diligences of Lafitte and Caillard, and for the traveller who came from the north nothing was lacking to create this illusion : a deafening uproar of wheels badly fixed in their hubs, harmonious jinglings of little bells, the cries of the mayoral encouraging the mules in their furious gallop, while the driver, perched on his narrow seat, made the echoes ring out by the repeated cracklings of his whip.

And every moment, in the speed and dust of the vehicle, the worthy mayoral would tumble down from his seat and leap on to the footboard of the coupé or rotunda to inquire in an unfamiliar language, the Catalan of the frontiers, whether his passengers were comfortable.

It was very cheering after a long railway journey ; it varied the monotony of the immense straight lines, dull and even.

We used to start at noon, from the square of the Prefecture at Perignan, and go full speed, passing Poulestre, Nils-Sec, Villemoulagne, Viamyls, and other places at the same pace, until we reached the first spurs of the Pyrenées at Boulon.

At this last village in French soil the ascent becomes noticeable ; the diligence bears heavily behind on its cord traces, and the gallop of the mules changes into a tired jog-trot. Then the slope becomes still steeper ; the team slackens its pace more and more and the mayoral follows the carriage on foot ; most of the passengers do the same, above all those in the rotunda. We are anxious to relieve the poor mules and to stretch our legs. One of the passengers who has provided himself against emergencies offers a glass of Rivesaltes muscat all round, and together we admire the majestic sight of the sun setting in the Pyrenées.

The three or four more aristocratic passengers in the coupé have also joined the pedestrians, and the silence of the declining day is disturbed only by the monotonous sound of the bells, the slow grinding of the wheels on the road, or by the cry of the rare birds which seek a shelter for the night.

In the west, between the mountain gorges, and rising heavenwards, still lit up by the last glimmers of light, we discern the snowy peaks of Cerdagne which reach towards the clouds ; and nearer, the chain of Roca Bruna, then that of Foche and Janquere. What deep poetry emanates from this grandeur and sublimity of nature, and how man seems a puny dwarf when he thus climbs with difficulty the flank of one of these giants.

It was by this means that twelve or fourteen passengers were travelling from France to Spain a few years ago. They found themselves, after getting in and out of the diligence several times, in the heart of a mountainous district, perhaps

one league from Belegarde, the French village marking a post of the frontier.

The conversation was lively. We had discussed many things ; but—was it the ever-mysterious and penetrating influence of a fine autumn evening?—we had, above all, spoken of sorcerers, soothsayers, hypnotists and ghosts.

One of the passengers, a young man of not more than twenty-five, who seemed to be a commercial traveller from the south, had markedly displayed the greatest incredulity ; his scepticism and his denials were such that some of his travelling companions began to eye him with mocking glances.

Among these was a Spaniard of about fifty years of age, who, to all appearances, belonged to the tribe of cattle dealers numerous on the frontier. His peculiar accentuation of the Castilian language betrayed an Andalusian, and, as he spoke French very badly, he had taken little part in the conversation. However, he had a swarthy complexion and two piercing black eyes, deep set under bushy eyebrows.

By-and-by, a burst of laughter too violent and a denial too absolute by the commercial traveller, on account of I know not what assertion, roused the Andalusian from his strange silence.

“Young man,” said he in bad French, speaking in a forceful and vibrating tone, “the manner of your bragging makes it clear that you would prove an extraordinary coward, were any of the things you deny to appear before you.”

“I say, old man,” replied the commercial traveller arrogantly, “whom are you calling a coward, if you please ? If it’s I whom you designate by this epithet, I defy you to repeat it !”

“Brat !” ejaculated the Spaniard, seizing the arm of the commercial traveller, whose face immediately screwed up with pain, “whom do you think you are dealing with that

you defy me in this way? . . . I tell you, I, that you would swoon away at the sight of the meanest phantom."

"Oh! oh!" cried the wag, losing some of his self-assurance, "I say, let me go!—you are nothing more than a brute!"

The other passengers intervened, and a few moments later, the road becoming level in winding round the edge of a precipice which it overhung sheer, each one resumed his seat in the diligence. A full quarter of an hour later the Catalan stopped in the only street in Bellegarde.

It was quite dark; passports were shown and a fresh team was harnessed. The new team descended the Spanish Pyrenees at full speed to the jingling of bells, the noise of wheels, and the cracking of the short Catalan whip.

The vehicle reached Figueras at the scheduled time of eight o'clock.

At the inn, stopping place of diligences, dinner was prepared: omelet, roast mutton cutlets, fried potatoes. In spite of the scanty menu and the unwholesome way in which it was served, each one did honour to the meal; the fourteen guests had good appetites. Afterwards the servants attached to the inn served us with oranges, apples and coffee.

The conversation round the table had become general; we had returned to phantoms, spiritualism, and second sight. The commercial traveller, in the light of the lamps, was displaying more raillery and even more incredulity than he had shown on the road.

"Well then," said the aged Spaniard, taking him to task once more, "I shall bring up before you, if you wish it, any dead person you care to name."

"Nonsense!" replied the young man, chaffing; "you have strong wrists, it's true, but you're not more knowing for all that!"

"Do you agree?"

The joker hesitated.

"Go on," said some of the passengers who were very puzzled and whose curiosity was now kindled, "make up your mind, risk it!"

"All right, then," finally said the commercial traveller.

"In that case," replied the Spaniard, "I'll wager one thousand francs that you won't be able to withstand more than one apparition."

"A thousand francs? . . . Never! I can't risk losing such a sum!"

"Since you deny everything with such self-confidence, you're sure to win!"

The cattle dealer's argument was irrefutable.

"I can't stake more than 200 francs," said the young man.

His opponent smiled scornfully and put back the money which he had taken out of his pocket.

"Do you think then," said he, "that for such a miserable sum I would disturb the spirits and force them to return to this world? No, no; I bet one thousand francs. . . . Stake the whole amount if you want to. Or else . . . nothing!"

Curiosity, round the table, had reached its height; each one was burning to see the outcome of this strange wrangle.

"My word," said a passenger laughing, "I'll gladly venture two hundred francs . . . as a sleeping partner."

"And I, as well."

"And I, two hundred."

Ten minutes later the sum of eight hundred francs was pushed forward towards the commercial traveller who had to make up the full amount of the stake.

Driven into his last entrenchment, the young jester had turned slightly pale, but he nevertheless collected the money and put it into his purse.

Everybody left the table eagerly. The Spaniard begged the innkeeper to let him use one of his rooms; we were

taken to a closet on the ground floor opening into the garden of the inn and closed by a thin door of fir-wood.

The enchanter showed his mocking antagonist in, left him in the dark and remained outside while the passengers gathered round him. Sombre flashes left his eyes, his dusky face, with parchment-like skin, assumed an almost diabolical expression. He regarded the little closed door fixedly and muttered some unintelligible words.

A few moments of solemn silence supervened.

"Well then," said the jeering voice of the commercial traveller, "is it for to-day or to-morrow?"

"What do you see?" inquired the Spaniard.

"Nothing!"

Another few moments of silence ensued. The old man was still stammering sentences and making peculiar gestures.

"And now?" said he.

"I see," said the young man in a slightly different tone, "a white haze . . . in a corner of the room."

"This haze moves, doesn't it?"

"It's coming towards me. . . . It takes on a human shape. . . . Yes! yes! I can distinguish the outline of the head! . . ."

"Whom do you wish to see?"

The commercial traveller did not answer right away; at length, his voice reached us—trembling and low.

"My mother!" said he.

"Get ready . . . look!" commanded the old man.

A prolonged silence followed. Our hearts were palpitating violently.

All of a sudden, a heart-rending cry rang out from the closet.

"It's she!" said the young man, terror-stricken, "my poor mother! . . . She's here in her shroud, her eyes are open, the tears wrested from her in death-struggle are still on her



cheeks. She's coming . . . she holds me tight, she embraces me! Enough, mercy! . . . Miserable sorcerer, stop, I can no longer . . . Help, help! . . ."

The sound of a body falling heavily on the floor was heard.

The passengers rushed headlong into the closet and lifted up the unfortunate commercial traveller, victim of a severe fit of nervous breakdown. Cold water was poured on his face, vinegar was sent for, his hands were patted.

At last he appeared to come to. But then a foolish anger seemed to possess him.

"Where is he, that infamous Spaniard," cried he, "where is he, I'll strangle him! Ah! the wretch . . . to torture a fellow-creature in this way!"

The passengers began to look for the cattle dealer, who was nowhere to be seen. Then, the young man, freeing himself from the hands of those who tended him, rushed out in pursuit of the sorcerer and was lost in the profound gloom of the garden. . . .

With him disappeared the 800 francs advanced.

On re-entering the diligence to go on to Girone, the passengers laughed a little on the wrong side of the mouth at the audacious sorcerer's swindle.

"Bah!" concluded one of them, "we've had a good comedy for our money, and the rogues played their parts admirably."



JOHN TALLAND

*Reincarnation*



## REINCARNATION

JAMES GRIGG had made up his mind to commit suicide. As he threw one leg over the wooden fence that bounded the railway cutting, he paused, not from want of determination to make the final moves of his resolve, but in order to take one last swift look around at the world he was leaving. It was a fair world. The trees were just in leaf, fresh green, and casting dappled shadows where the strong noon sunlight fell. The sky was blue, flecked with high white clouds. Birds twittered.

There were no other noises in the countryside. It was a peaceful spot, well chosen for the purpose. On the left the cutting deepened sharply as the ground rose, until, not two hundred yards distant, the gleaming metals ran into the round black hole of a tunnel's mouth.

There was in James Grigg that animal instinct to carry wounds or hurts into some dark place, away from the world. He wanted no spectacular exit, but a quiet painless passing to whatever waited. In making up his mind he had fully weighed the arguments for and against, writing his reasons carefully down on a clean white sheet of paper, in his neat handwriting.

This was no case of insanity. He realised that. He was in full possession of his senses, but life, as shown on the completed balance-sheet, was not worth living. With one leg over the fence, he steadied himself and drew the folded paper from his pocket. He had nearly forgotten that, before going into the tunnel, that last piece of evidence had to be destroyed.

The tiny fragments fell from his fingers and were gently scattered into the grass by the faint breeze. Then, with stiff movements he pulled himself with his left arm over the fence and slid down the bank to the permanent way. The right arm hung limply by his side. It was a wooden arm covered at the extremity by a white cotton glove.

Except for his infirmity, he was a man one would never notice. His face was gentle in its outlines, his eyes mild and blue ; a man of stocky build, there was yet an indeterminate air about him, a certain irresolution. He was forty years old, and a failure. He knew he was a failure. Nothing he had ever done had been successful. Endowed with average intelligence he lacked resolution. He had, as he himself expressed it, "no guts."

That lack of "guts" had damned him throughout his life : the shy, hesitating, nervous manner had always made him the butt of ribaldry. He had lost one position after another, and now he was workless and penniless. He had never married, for the very good reason that he had never asked anyone to marry him.

In the war he had been selected, from almost the first day, to be an office orderly, and having never left England, had known no fighting. A bomb dropped in a country field near a South Coast training camp had simultaneously deprived him of his arm and killed a cow. At the time it had seemed to him that the cow's untimely demise had created the most interest.

The balance sheet had been easy to make up : James Grigg, workless and friendless, forty and a failure, had made the one big resolve of his life when he had decided that to go on trying to evade by passive resistance the difficulties that loomed against him, all through his life, was not worth the indefinite future.

The end was not to be difficult. He had only to walk

into the dark mouth of the tunnel—well into it, safe from curious, prying eyes, safe from molestation, like a rabbit into its burrow, and lie down on the railway line—and wait. It would be swift and easy.

In the right-hand waistcoat pocket of his navy-blue serge suit was a screw of paper with four sleeping tablets in it. He had tried them, swallowing two out of his original purchase of six, and was satisfied that they were efficacious. In a little while he would take the whole four—they were quite harmless. Then he would lay himself down across the metals, and wait.

There was no slackening of pace as he stepped from sleeper to sleeper along the track toward the tunnel. He dreaded most disappearing into that blackness. No courage was needed for the rest.

He slightly braced his shoulders and swung his one sound arm with military precision, the other hanging at his side, and so, without a backward glance and scarcely a backward thought, he marched out of the sunlight into the round portal of the tunnel.

Immediately, a cold, dank whiff of air, in which was mixed the acrid stale fumes of smoke, caressed him from head to foot. He shivered slightly, but pressed on, and presently he grew accustomed to the smell. It carried memories. It reminded him of a time when, as a little boy, he had been taken to the sea-side for a holiday. With gaudy, painted bucket and wood spade firmly clutched in his small hand he had hung his head from the carriage window inhaling deep breaths of the engine's smoke.

The tunnel was not so quiet as he had imagined it would be. His footsteps rang and echoed loudly, so that he felt they could be heard a mile away. Somewhere water trickled continuously. It sounded more like a rushing river than a rivulet. Loud splashes and plops told of moisture oozing from the roof, to fall into the puddles beneath.

At first he felt breathless to think of trains nearly approaching before he was ready, but after a while, as the blackness enfolded him utterly, he realised that the rails were conducting the sound from trains probably miles away.

He coughed nervously. The roar of his cough boomed and echoed back at him for some seconds, as if some monstrous giant had roared aloud. The tunnel, he knew, was about a mile and a half long, but surely, if anyone stood in any part of it, they could hear?

In front the blackness was absolute, so that he had to feel his way from sleeper to sleeper. Once he halted, the old fear gripped him in the throat so that he swallowed hard. So easy to turn back. The old hesitation returned—but only momentarily. A quick look over his shoulder revealed far back a small crescent of light from the entrance. The tunnel was not straight, there was a bend in it; but when next he turned his head the crescent had disappeared from view. He plodded slowly on.

Then from the distance grew a murmur of sound, the rails quivered and hummed noisily. His mouth grew dry as he realised that a train was undoubtedly approaching. Quickly his fingers fumbled for the screw of paper. Possibly the train was yet outside the tunnel.

But from which way was it coming? Try as he would he could not decide. The tunnel had two tracks. If the train approached, on which track should he lie for quick deliverance? The right? Or the left? He felt the tablets in his hand, his fingers were shaking, and some of them fell and were lost in the cinders. Only one remained and he swallowed it. But one would not be enough. Frantically he scrambled his fingers over the rough clinkers, turning round and round in his haste, then sweeping his hand along the sleepers in case one had fallen fair. But time was short.

The murmur had increased to a roar. It seemed impossible



that the noise could get any louder. Utterly confused, he realised that he was lost. His dreams of peaceful death were not to be realised. He was to be dashed to pieces standing up unless he got down to the rails—and quickly. He fell and clutched the rail with his one hand, crouching with tense body hunched, and as he did so a terrific, shrieking din, so loud that it seemed the very walls of the tunnel would collapse at the intensity of it, accompanied the crashing noises of the oncoming train.

Then it was upon him!

His eyes were shut tight. He heard the wheels jump and rattle—but rhythmically beating a heavy tattoo over and around him. There was no physical pain, only torture of the cardrums and nerves. The noise persisted for a few seconds, then became less. He should have been dead, crushed and cut to pieces, but he was alive, and whole. The train had passed on the other line.

For some moments Grigg crouched in the same attitude. His mind was incapable of accepting any fact except that he was alive. He was breathing hard and his heart jumped about jerkily. The name of the Deity was on his lips. He could not help repeating it over and over again, but as the noise died away and the humming rails grew quieter peace returned.

Badly shaken, he rose to his feet and began to walk. The conviction grew on him that he had been caught. He had failed again in something he had set out to do. Bungled it badly, and the experience had been terrifying. But it had taught him a lesson. He would not fail again. He knew now what to expect. The next train would find him prepared, possibly sleeping. As soon as he felt the drug was making him tired he would lie down and sleep. He seemed to feel weaker already. The darkness pressed in on his staring eyeballs, already smarting from the fumes. He closed his eyes

and stepped along from sleeper to sleeper, one arm outstretched into the impenetrable darkness.

It had been a fancy that he would choose a point midway along the tunnel, and after a while he decided that he must be near the middle. Then he began to wonder whether, in the confusion of dropping the tablets and the train's passing, he had continued in the right direction, or whether he was now returning by the way he had come. This doubt settled his mind. He would go no further. Lowering himself to the railway line, he sat on one of the rails.

As soon as the echo of his footsteps died away a new sound came to his ears, a faint moan or cry, repeated twice. He strained his ears to listen, but heard no sound except the now familiar tunnel noises.

He decided to inquire.

"Hi! Who's that?" His voice boomed away into the distance. Any immediate reply would have been swallowed in the echoes. He repeated the shout, but in a lower voice, timorously.

There was no reply.

The thought that the tunnel was inhabited with another living creature was disturbing. It upset his purpose. The necessity to find out who or what it was could not be ignored. He proceeded to search, calling in a low voice into the darkness.

"Hullo, 'ullo, 'ullo!"

For a long time he searched before he found, and then it was by falling over a body, badly scratching and cutting his hand and knees on the sharp clinkers in the process.

A low moan came from the form when he kicked over it. James Grigg's compassion was easily stirred. He had no fear for anything that was hurt. Pity and sympathy flooded through him, to the exclusion of his own hurt.

"You hurt?" he cried. But there was no answer.

In the darkness he passed his hand lightly over the figure.

It was a man, breathing, the clothes wet and sloppy to the touch of his cut hand. The man was half lying in a puddle, and had apparently rolled over in it. Search revealed a wet and useless box of matches in one of the coat pockets. He threw them away.

Here was need to take a decision, and Grigg took it without hesitation. At any moment another train might come upon them. That danger entailed precaution. He felt the four railway lines and dragged the senseless body slowly and carefully between the two centre rails so that it lay lengthways. In so doing he had to exert all the strength of his one arm, and the exertion made him breathe heavily. Again the man moaned.

"What's up?" whispered Grigg solicitously. "What's happened?"

But there was no reply. He stood upright to consider what to do, and could not decide.

Should he go and fetch help? Or wait until help came? Then gradually he became aware of the angry warning of the rails. A train was coming.

Every moment the noise grew louder. A distant thin shriek from the whistle heralded its rush into the tunnel.

This time his brain was lightning swift, telling him what to do. He stooped and felt the rails. Those on the left trembled and throbbed as with life. Those on the right were still. He threw himself down on the right and lay along the side of the track, pressing his body down to the uneven ballast, his arm around his head, his heart throbbing almost painfully.

As before, the noise increased to tremendous cacophony. It swooped down on him, a blare of discordant sound. There was a rushing of wind—the ground trembled and seemed to rock—light swept past him with the noise—and it was over, with only the swinging tail-lamp disappearing, like a red

spark, around the distant bend of the tunnel. The noise died away. Quietness returned.

James Grigg's first thought was for the stranger. He felt his way to the spot between the lines until he found the body. The man was conscious and spoke in a low voice.

"Where am I?"

"You're all right," whispered Grigg. "You're in the tunnel, that's all. You hurt? Can you walk?"

The man moaned again and was silent. But walking was soon discovered to be out of the question. There was a badly broken leg, and various contusions and cuts that brought protesting gasps as Grigg's unpractised fingers investigated.

What should he do? Go for help? Yes—and suppose the half-conscious man rolled himself over again in his pain, across the metals? It would never do to leave him. To wait for help would be equally foolish. He might bleed to death. Better to try and get him out.

Before he began he realised the enormity of the task he had set himself. He had no idea of the distance to the tunnel's nearest exit. It might be a mile—or less. And which way should he choose? There was no lightening of the blackness on either side. It was not worth thinking about. He was entirely without sense of direction in the darkness.

"Can you get on your feet, so that I can carry you?" he whispered. (It seemed imperative to whisper in that darkness.)

But the man had fainted again. Perhaps it was as well. To lift a wounded man, and a heavy man at that, is no easy task for anyone equipped with average strength and two arms. Grigg had only one arm, but it was powerful, and the necessity of making it serve for two had taught him cunning in the use of it.

He lay on the ground and got underneath the man, the inert form across his back. Then slowly, and with infinite

care, he exerted every ounce of his strength to get to his feet, his teeth fastened into the cloth of a limp arm and his sound left arm around a pair of legs—one broken.

The journey, a torture from the beginning, became an agony. Stepping slowly along between the lines, the burden on his shoulders dragged more heavily at every pace. His arm racked with pain at partially supporting the weight; his breath whistled between his teeth like that of a runner badly exhausted. Soon his lungs felt red hot.

But he would not give up. He would do this thing if it were the last thing he ever did—to get into the light! All his life he had tried to get into the light and failed from lack of resolution—not strength. Now it was strength and resolution combined that was called for. If once he lowered the burden—he failed. Step by step he forced his way into the darkness. It seemed shot with red sparks and flashes of light which radiated before his smarting eyeballs in circles and whirls.

And so he did not see the thin crescent of light from the tunnel's mouth until he had rounded the bend, and then the full force of daylight seemed to come on him suddenly. But the distance, although short, was almost beyond his capability. By this time his whole body was racked with anguish. His eyelids were leaden with the effect of the narcotic. The temptation to let go and sink down to sleepful oblivion thrust back at every painful step he took. It seemed impossible ever to get to the round hole where the daylight flooded through.

When he was at the very end of his endurance and the thought had already registered on his brain that it was impossible to go another yard, that he had failed, some second strength seemed to flow through him, strengthening the resolve to succeed. And so he carried on. Step by step, until half blind, and swaying from side to side, he emerged from the mouth of the tunnel. At that moment the red rim

of the sun disappeared below the horizon and, in the half light crimsoned with after-glow, he deposited his burden against the steep slope of the cutting, and with it gently subsided to the ground.

\*     \*     \*     \*

James Grigg awakened very slowly.

He had dreamed of being carried, like a corpse to a funeral while men with gruff voices, some carrying lanterns, had marched beside his body, talking to each other. His eyes slowly opening took stock of the room in which he lay. A pleasantly furnished room, small and filled with old-fashioned furniture. The bed he occupied was a four-poster, with soft linen sheets that caressed his stubbled chin.

Stuck up in a bed like this—a good comfortable bed—a feather bed—after that terrible time in the tunnel. The tunnel—memory returned. He remembered—then his dream of being carried was actual memory. But what of the other man? Who and what was he? It was a quiet morning. From the distance came the intermittent chop . . . chop . . . chip-chop of somebody cutting wood with an axe; the air carried a faint tang of frying bacon; outside the window a murmur of voices suddenly became more distinct, as when a door opens. He heard one say: “Is he awake yet?” and the answer, “I’m going up to see in a minute.” Presently he heard footsteps approaching and he shut his eyes, feigning sleep. He felt that, being in bed, he ought to be asleep until awakened. He waited until the visitor was well into the room before opening his eyes.

Approaching, with curiosity written on her plump red cheeks, was a buxom woman, who might have been nurse or farmer’s wife. She smiled, flashing good teeth.

“Awake then? Now I’ll get you a bite of something to eat. Shan’t be a minute!”

Before he had time to speak she had gone. Grigg smiled to himself, he was feeling pleasantly hungry. He hoped it would be bacon—two or three rashers—well done and curling and crisp.

The voices outside the window rose and fell as if a number of people were holding an argument. He listened intently, but could only catch an occasional word. Once a man's voice—shriller than the others—more like a boy's, said: "But I tell you, Yagger . . ." He couldn't catch the rest, but the name caught his memory. Yagger—curious name—one you didn't forget easily, and he knew it so well. Didn't everybody know of Emile Yagger. The name was on everyone's lips. But why? Memory balked. He couldn't remember. So much had happened in the tunnel to obscure recollection of the life before. The door latch clicked. The woman entered with a tray on which a cup and bowl sat steaming.

"Bread and milk," she said, smiling, "and tea."

Grigg choked back his disappointment. The smell of bacon had been so good.

"Thank you, ma'am," he said, reaching his one arm out of the bed. "If you'd hold it so—just a minute. You see I've only one arm."

"You poor soul," she said kindly. "How you carried him, nobody knows! There's a roomful of 'em downstairs, waiting to see you to ask that! They want your story."

"Who?" queried Grigg.

"Why, these newspaper men of course. I told 'em they could see you when I said so—not before!"

"What about—what about. . . ."

"The other?" she took him up and her face changed curiously. "Yagger. They've taken him away. *He's gone.*" Her voice carried a tragic finality.

"Gone! You mean dead?"

"Dead ! I should think not indeed ! Won't be dead until he's hanged—and that won't be so long either !" She turned and left the room.

Yagger ! Emile Yagger ! Now he knew ! Every newspaper in the country clamoured to know where was Emile Yagger. Gentleman murderer, poisoner of half a dozen wives, cut-throat. The whole country had been searching for weeks. And all the while he must have been in the tunnel.

To think that he, James Grigg, had found Yagger—and brought him in—single-handed ! He had done something indeed ! He began to feel very different from the cringing, hesitant creature that had been James Grigg before.

His blue eyes lit up as he began to create the life story of the new James Grigg. He promised himself it should be very interesting.



REARDEN CONNOR

*Rats*



## RATS

SINCE early morning the soldiers had been peppering the heavily shuttered house. They had erected barricades on the opposite side of the street, and here several riflemen and a machine-gunner crouched. The wooden shutters of the house were as full of holes as a sponge. But still revolvers barked from hidden loopholes.

The soldiers knew that the four men trapped in the house would fight to the last shot before surrendering. They were murderers, men who had been surprised in the act of robbing a safe by a member of the Civic Guard.

They had shot the guard down in cold blood and had later been tracked to this house on the outskirts of the town. The military had come down from the barracks to rout them out.

Mickey-dad Riley was the leader of the men. From earliest boyhood he had been called "Mickey-dad" because of his solemn dominant manner, which made his playmates, and later his associates in crime look for leadership from him. It was his proud boast that he had never done a day's work in his life. This old house in which he and his mates were now cornered was the "hang-out" of his little gang.

Mickey-dad had been a gunman in the war against the Black-and-Tans, and his business had solely a "stick-up" basis. He and his disciples haunted racecourses and sports meetings up and down the country and made a pleasant income from "sticking-up" bookies and game-merchants on

their way home from the meets. But lately Buck Maloney had joined up with the gang. Buck could crack a safe like a nut, and indeed had "done time" in England for his activities. Mickey-dad immediately opened a new branch of business, so to speak, and cast his eyes towards the by-no-means up-to-date safes owned by the traders in the town.

Buck Maloney was now dead. He lay on his back in the front bedroom of the house. His beautifully cut navy suit was crushed (Buck had been a bit of a dandy); his perfectly shaved face and silk shirt were stained with his life's blood. In his hand he still clutched a revolver. He sprawled under the window like a stuck frog, his long pointed brown shoes lending an air of incongruity to his appearance as they jutted up below his trouser-ends.

The machine-gunner had spotted him peering through a half-open shutter and had promptly torn away the side of his head. Mickey-dad had cursed him roundly after he had fallen. "To hell with ye!" he had cried out.

He could not afford to lose a man just then. A few minutes later Tommy Gallagher had been shot in the back as he stood in the middle of the room. He had not been standing in front of one of the windows either, but directly between them. A rifle bullet from a sharp angle had spat in at the side of the window and had broken Tommy's spine. Now he lay on a horse-hair sofa, powerless, useless, whining like a young animal.

There remained only Mickey-dad and Bill Cogan. Bill was a good fellow, Mickey-dad reflected. He would fight to the very last, although there did not seem to be much hope of holding off the soldiers until nightfall, when there might be some chance of a getaway. But even escape by night would be difficult, for Mickey-dad knew that behind the high wall which backed on to the rear of the house a dozen soldiers lurked, waiting.

He was nervous lest the soldiers would realise that two of his men had been picked off. He sent Cogan rushing all over the house, firing from this and that room to give the illusion that the four were still going strong. It was an old trick, and he hoped fervently that it would work.

Gallagher's perpetual whine was beginning to get on his nerves. It pierced his brain like an endless needle. Then, suddenly, it ceased. Mickey-dad walked over to the sofa. Gallagher opened his eyes and looked up at him with the innocent gaze of a child. It was a reproachful look. His body heaved. A last spasm of pain crossed his features. Then he relaxed and lay as though he were quietly sleeping. One foot slipped gently over the edge of the sofa and then crashed on to the floor.

Mickey-dad went in search of Cogan. He found him in the attic. Cogan had succeeded in making a loophole in the wall at the floor level just under the window by scrabbling out two bricks. The soldiers could not see this manœuvre because the wall at that point was screened by a row of chimney-pots.

"Tommy's kicked out," Mickey-dad told Cogan.

"Lord have mercy on him!" muttered Cogan. "'Twas better for him that he did."

Mickey-dad sent Cogan down to the parlour. He lay flat on his stomach with his eyes at the loop-hole. A little draught blew around the chimney and wafted some of the mortar-dust into his face. He swore profusely and spent some minutes on his knees cleaning his eyes with a handkerchief. Then he brushed away the dust from the hole with the thoroughness of a housewife.

For a long time he lay as still as a log watching the soldiers behind the barricade. They were very intent on their job. After all, it was not every day that they had an opportunity to test their marksmanship on living targets. Behind the

barricade there was an archway, and now and again one or other of them crept in or out on hands and knees.

Mickey-dad had about thirty rounds of ammunition belted to his person. He decided to use each one to full advantage. With his first bullet he knocked away one of the chimney-pots. Now he had a clearer view. The falling pieces of the pot attracted the soldiers, and he saw two of them look up at the attic window. His second bullet accounted for the machine-gunner.

The gun was immediately manned by another, but before he had time to point the muzzle at the attic window Mickey-dad's third bullet had crashed into his head. Mickey-dad crowed with delight as he saw the soldier give a sudden spring, throw out his arms, and fall back on his dead comrade. He saw an officer crawling out from the archway. In his smooth-faced uniform he looked like a huge green dog as he edged his way towards the machine-gun on all fours.

Rifle bullets smashed through the attic window. Broken glass showered down on Mickey-dad's back. Men came running out from the archway and hastily heightened the barricade in front of the machine-gun. The muzzle of the gun was trained on the attic window. A stream of lead whistled into the room above Mickey-dad's head and buried itself in the plaster ceiling. But even the high barricade could not save the soldiers from his bullets. One by one the gunners fell over the weapon until at last the soldiers withdrew into the archway.

A quarter of an hour elapsed and Mickey-dad waited impatiently. There was not even the sound of a footfall in the street below. The dead soldiers lay there like so many discarded bolsters. In death they had no individuality. They were just corpses dressed alike. Then Bill Cogan started to snap at something with his revolver down below in the parlour. Mickey-dad had almost forgotten him in his excitement.

He wondered for a moment if Cogan were fool enough to waste ammunition, and was about to run downstairs and curse him for an omadhaun. But then he remembered that Cogan was the least impetuous of all his boys and he concluded that something was happening in the archway.

The next moment a spray of machine-gun bullets swept through the shattered window over his head. He thanked his stars that he had not stood up to go downstairs. The bullets flitted across the room with sounds like the fluttering of thrushes' wings at the height of a man's chest. The soldiers were now firing from the attic window of the house opposite. They had the window heavily sandbagged, leaving themselves only a peep-hole from which a red tongue of flame darted spitefully.

Mickey-dad could not fire at the sandbagged window from his peep-hole. That was a physical impossibility, and, anyway, the brickwork of the chimney was in his way. He saw now that it was futile to remain there any longer. He lay for some time, thinking hard. This fight was hopeless from every point of view. There were soldiers in the front, soldiers at the back. If he held out much longer they would surely bomb the place.

He was fed up with the whole business. The soldiers were determined to get him, dead or alive. He had certainly no intention of surrendering and being in due course hanged by the neck. He had started this fight in the first place because he knew what fate lay in store for him, having shot the guard who had discovered Buck Maloney rifling the safe.

In his pocket he had a large envelope. In that envelope there were £200 in notes—not crisp notes fresh from the bank which would be a trap for any man, but old creased notes paid to Sam Moynihan, the grain dealer, on the previous day by his various customers. Sam was not a methodical man. He would not have kept a list of the numbers. Mickey-dad

thought how easy it would be to get away to Liverpool if he could only escape from the house.

Suddenly he had an inspiration. His eyes shone with joy. The solution was simple. He would hide in the cavity under the kitchen floor which the gang had made to conceal their loot, weapons and ammunition. But then there was Cogan to consider. Mickey-dad had once again almost forgotten his partner.

Cogan would naturally want to escape, too. Two men would not fit in the cavity under the floor. And, besides, Cogan would be sure to demand a goodly portion of the £200, perhaps even half of it. Two hundred pounds was such a nice round sum that Mickey-dad was grieved to think of it being wilfully divided into two odd sums.

He began to crawl along by the skirting of the wall. The machine-gun bullets still flicked through the window and ripped up the end wall of the room.

He reached the door and worked his way on all-fours to the landing outside. Then he clattered down the stairs. Cogan came out of the parlour into the little hall at the foot of the stairs and said: "They're firin' from the house over the street." He looked pale and scared.

"I know that," said Mickey-dad shortly.

"Can't we get out of here?" Cogan cried. "We'll be caught in a trap if we stick on."

"We'll be caught, anyway," Mickey-dad retorted. "The place is surrounded."

"Oh, Mother of God!" groaned Cogan. "Why did I ever get into this mess?"

"That's what many a man has said to hisself with the rope round his neck. But it was too late then."

"I'm not goin' to let them sojers get me!" Cogan said fiercely. "I'll blow me brains out first!"

"Where's your gun?" asked Mickey-dad.



"In the room. I haven't a round left. Give us a few if ye have any to spare?"

"Ye can have this one," said Mickey-dad, lifting his revolver and pointing it at Cogan's head. Horror was registered instantly on Cogan's face. His lips writhed.

"What's the matter with ye, man?" he shouted. "Have ye taken leave of your senses?"

"Just savin' ye the trouble of blowin' out yer own brains, Mickey-dad told him. He pressed the trigger. The gun roared in the narrow confines of the hall. Cogan swayed and slumped down, his fingers twitching as though he sought to grasp at his already departed life.

Mickey-dad pocketed the revolver and went into the kitchen. He lifted back the faded red linoleum and revealed a long slit in the floor. By inserting a knife blade in the slit he was able to lift up a section of the floor which swung like a door on concealed hinges. Underneath there was a cavity about six feet in length, not quite two feet in depth, and three feet in width. For over a year this had been the "strong room" of the gang.

"Now," thought Mickey-dad, "I'll sit tight until they come. Then I'll pop in there an' after they've searched the house and gone I'll slip out."

He sat down on a bentwood chair. He had a few cigarettes in his jacket pocket and a box of matches. He lit a cigarette and puffed heartily. The machine-gun was still stuttering, and an occasional rifle shot rang out. He smoked through all his cigarettes, and still the soldiers did not come. One by one he dropped the butts into the cavity.

Then came a pregnant silence. He listened so hard that he was positive he had more than a suggestion of an ache in his ear drums.

He sat as still as a Buddha in an eastern temple for a full hour. Then he heard loud voices outside the front door.

Men shouted. A rain of blows fell on the stout oak panels. He rose from his chair and lay down in the cavity. He lowered the camouflaged lid after him, but so shallow was his hiding-place that the lid did not fall into position until he had stretched his arms down by his side.

He heard the sounds of smashing timber, of feet running, of men calling to one another. All were muffled so that they seemed very far away. Then feet tramped above his head. The soldiers were in the kitchen now. He had been desperately afraid that the lid had not fitted properly into place, that some bulge in the linoleum would betray his presence under the floor. But now those heavy-booted feet were making sure that the lid was properly pressed home. The footsteps boomed in Mickey-dad's ears.

He visualised the soldiers poking and prodding and searching everywhere for the fourth man.

Eventually they would conclude that he had escaped before they had surrounded the house. After the bodies were removed to the mortuary they would clear off and he would creep out of this wretched hole for a breather and escape at nightfall.

But the soldiers seemed to be a long time searching and Mickey-dad was growing more and more uncomfortable. The rough concrete which had been laid on the bottom of the cavity to protect the loot from vermin was racking his flesh. His whole body was cramped. A stale clayey smell assailed his nostrils. The air was foul. He could find scarcely enough to breathe. He knew that if he did not get out it would be but a matter of hours until he would suffocate.

Now there was less running about overhead. But the men were still in the kitchen. They talked a lot, talked and talked and talked.

Two hours passed. Mickey-dad was in agony. He was gasping for breath. His limbs ached. His wrists and even his

collar-bone ached. A pain not dissimilar to the "growing-pains" of his youth throbbed down to his big toes. Still the men talked in the kitchen. Mickey-dad was using up more air in his agitation than he need have done if he had kept calm.

But a man who is slowly, very slowly, suffocating can scarcely remain calm. He hoped desperately that every sound overhead was an indication of the departure of the soldiers. This hope sustained him, and only for it he would have cried out long before through sheer physical discomfort.

He felt his face clammy with cold perspiration. To keep his nerve he tried to think of what he could do with the two hundred pounds in his pocket. The minutes dragged on till another hour had been ticked off. Mickey-dad's lungs were so starved of air that he croaked faintly at every gasp. He tried to put his hand to his chest, but he could not move his arms. He was held there between wood and concrete like a garment in a presser. Still the men talked on. "What the hell do they keep talkin' about, anyway!" Mickey-dad thought. "Why don't they clear out!"

The men, however, had no intention of clearing out. Only four soldiers were left in charge of the house. The others had gone back to the barracks. One of the soldiers was on guard at the battered front door and another at the back door. A corporal and a private were seated at the kitchen table, playing cards. These two men were doing all the talking.

Mickey-dad lifted his body so as to raise the section of the flooring just a half-inch to let in some fresh air. But it did not budge because the corporal (who was stout and jolly) had placed his chair exactly on top of it. Mickey-dad became desperate. The urge to live overwhelmed him. He beat at the floor with his head.

The corporal paused in his diatribe against his run of ill luck with the cards that day. He listened for a moment. Then he whispered across the table to the private: "A

bloomin' rat ! Just under me chair it is !” He drew his revolver gently from its holster, pointed the muzzle at the floor and fired twice. He listened again. There was not a sound.

“That’s put the kybosh on that poor baste !” he said heartily, and went on with his game.

“SAKI”

*Gabriel-Ernest*



## GABRIEL-ERNEST

“**T**HERE is a wild beast in your woods,” said the artist Cunningham, as he was being driven to the station. It was the only remark he had made during the drive, but as Van Cheele had talked incessantly his companion’s silence had not been noticeable.

“A stray fox or two and some resident weasels. Nothing more formidable,” said Van Cheele. The artist said nothing.

“What did you mean about a wild beast?” said Van Cheele later, when they were on the platform.

“Nothing. My imagination. Here is the train,” said Cunningham.

That afternoon Van Cheele went for one of his frequent rambles through his woodland property. He had a stuffed bittern in his study, and knew the names of quite a number of wild flowers, so his aunt had possibly some justification in describing him as a great naturalist. At any rate, he was a great walker. It was his custom to take mental notes of everything he saw during his walks, not so much for the purpose of assisting contemporary science as to provide topics for conversation afterwards. When the bluebells began to show themselves in flower he made a point of informing everyone of the fact ; the season of the year might have warned his hearers of the likelihood of such an occurrence, but at least they felt that he was being absolutely frank with them.

What Van Cheele saw on this particular afternoon was, however, something far removed from his ordinary range of experience. On a shelf of smooth stone overhanging a deep

pool in the hollow of an oak coppice a boy of about sixteen lay asprawl, drying his wet brown limbs luxuriously in the sun. His wet hair, parted by a recent dive, lay close to his head, and his light brown eyes, so light that there was an almost tigerish gleam in them, were turned towards Van Cheele with a certain lazy watchfulness.

It was an unexpected apparition, and Van Cheele found himself engaged in the novel process of thinking before he spoke. Where on earth could this wild-looking boy hail from? The miller's wife had lost a child some two months ago, supposed to have been swept away by the mill-race, but that had been a mere baby, not a half-grown lad.

"What are you doing there?" he demanded.

"Obviously, sunning myself," replied the boy.

"Where do you live?"

"Here, in these woods."

"You can't live in the woods," said Van Cheele.

"They are very nice woods," said the boy, with a touch of patronage in his voice.

"But where do you sleep at night?"

"I don't sleep at night; that's my busiest time."

Van Cheele began to have an irritated feeling that he was grappling with a problem that was eluding him.

"What do you feed on?" he asked.

"Flesh," said the boy, and he pronounced the word with slow relish, as though he were tasting it.

"Flesh! What flesh?"

"Since it interests you, rabbits, wild-fowl, hares, poultry, lambs in their season, children when I can get any; they're usually too well locked in at night, when I do most of my hunting. It's quite two months since I tasted child-flesh."

Ignoring the chaffing nature of the last remark Van Cheele tried to draw the boy on the subject of possible poaching operations.



"You're talking rather through your hat when you speak of feeding on hares." (Considering the nature of the boy's toilet the simile was hardly an apt one.) "Our hillside hares aren't easily caught."

"At night I hunt on four feet," was the somewhat cryptic response.

"I suppose you mean that you hunt with a dog?" hazarded Van Cheele.

The boy rolled slowly over on to his back, and laughed a weird low laugh, that was pleasantly like a chuckle and disagreeably like a snarl.

"I don't fancy any dog would be very anxious for my company, especially at night."

Van Cheele began to feel that there was something positively uncanny about the strange-eyed, strange-tongued youngster.

"I can't have you staying in these woods," he declared authoritatively.

"I fancy you'd rather have me here than in your house?" said the boy.

The prospect of this wild, nude animal in Van Cheele's primly ordered house was certainly an alarming one.

"If you don't go I shall have to make you," said Van Cheele.

The boy turned like a flash, plunged into the pool, and in a moment had flung his wet and glistening body half-way up the bank where Van Cheele was standing. In an otter the movement would not have been remarkable; in a boy Van Cheele found it sufficiently startling. His foot slipped as he made an involuntary backward movement, and he found himself almost prostrate on the slippery weed-grown bank, with those tigerish yellow eyes not very far from his own. Almost instinctively he half raised his hand to his throat. The boy laughed again, a laugh in which the snarl

had nearly driven out the chuckle, and then, with another of his astonishing lightning movements, plunged out of view into a yielding tangle of weed and fern.

“What an extraordinary wild animal!” said Van Cheele as he picked himself up. And then he recalled Cunningham’s remark, “There is a wild beast in your woods.”

Walking slowly homeward, Van Cheele began to turn over in his mind various local occurrences which might be traceable to the existence of this astonishing young savage.

Something had been thinning the game in the woods lately, poultry had been missing from the farms, hares were growing unaccountably scarcer, and complaints had reached him of lambs being carried off bodily from the hills. Was it possible that this wild boy was really hunting the countryside in company with some clever poacher dog? He had spoken of hunting “four-footed” by night, but then, again, he had hinted strangely at no dog caring to come near him, “especially at night.” It was certainly puzzling.

And then, as Van Cheele ran his mind over the various depredations that had been committed during the last month or two, he came suddenly to a dead stop, alike in his walk and his speculations. The child missing from the mill two months ago—the accepted theory was that it had tumbled into the mill-race and been swept away; but the mother had always declared she had heard a shriek on the hill side of the house, in the opposite direction from the water. It was unthinkable, of course, but he wished that the boy had not made that uncanny remark about child-flesh eaten two months ago. Such dreadful things should not be said even in fun.

Van Cheele, contrary to his usual wont, did not feel disposed to be communicative about his discovery in the wood. His position as a parish councillor and justice of the peace seemed somehow compromised by the fact that he was harbouring a personality of such doubtful repute on his

property ; there was even a possibility that a heavy bill of damages for raided lambs and poultry might be laid at his door. At dinner that night he was quite unusually silent.

"Where's your voice gone to?" said his aunt. "One would think you had seen a wolf."

Van Cheele, who was not familiar with the old saying, thought the remark rather foolish ; if he *had* seen a wolf on his property his tongue would have been extraordinarily busy with the subject.

At breakfast next morning Van Cheele was conscious that his feeling of uneasiness regarding yesterday's episode had not wholly disappeared, and he resolved to go by train to the neighbouring cathedral town, hunt up Cunningham, and learn from him what he had really seen that had prompted the remark about a wild beast in the woods. With this resolution taken, his usual cheerfulness partially returned, and he hummed a bright little melody as he sauntered to the morning-room for his customary cigarette.

As he entered the room the melody made way abruptly for a pious invocation. Gracefully a-sprawl on the ottoman, in an attitude of almost exaggerated repose, was the boy of the woods. He was drier than when Van Cheele had last seen him, but no other alteration was noticeable in his toilet.

"How dare you come here?" asked Van Cheele furiously.

"You told me I was not to stay in the woods," said the boy calmly.

"But not to come here. Supposing my aunt should see you!"

And with a view to minimising that catastrophe, Van Cheele hastily obscured as much of his unwelcome guest as possible under the folds of a *Morning Post*. At that moment his aunt entered the room.

"This is a poor boy who has lost his way—and lost his memory. He doesn't know who he is or where he comes

from,” explained Van Cheele desperately, glancing apprehensively at the waif’s face to see whether he was going to add inconvenient candour to his other savage propensities.

Miss Van Cheele was enormously interested.

“Perhaps his underlinen is marked,” she suggested.

“He seems to have lost most of that, too,” said Van Cheele, making frantic little grabs at the *Morning Post* to keep it in its place.

A naked homeless child appealed to Miss Van Cheele as warmly as a stray kitten or derelict puppy would have done.

“We must do all we can for him,” she decided, and in a very short time a messenger, dispatched to the rectory, where a page-boy was kept, had returned with a suit of pantry clothes, and the necessary accessories of shirt, shoes, collar, etc. Clothed, clean and groomed, the boy lost none of his uncanniness in Van Cheele’s eyes, but his aunt found him sweet.

“We must call him something till we know who he really is,” she said. “Gabriel-Ernest, I think ; those are nice suitable names.”

Van Cheele agreed, but he privately doubted whether they were being grafted on to a nice suitable child. His misgivings were not diminished by the fact that his staid and elderly spaniel had bolted out of the house at the first incoming of the boy, and now obstinately remained shivering and yapping at the farther end of the orchard, while the canary, usually as vocally industrious as Van Cheele himself, had put itself on an allowance of frightened cheeps. More than ever he was resolved to consult Cunningham without loss of time.

As he drove off to the station his aunt was arranging that Gabriel-Ernest should help her to entertain the infant members of her Sunday-school class at tea that afternoon.

Cunningham was not at first disposed to be communicative.

“My mother died of some brain trouble,” he explained,

"so you will understand why I am averse to dwelling on anything of an impossibly fantastic nature that I may see or think that I have seen."

"But what *did* you see?" persisted Van Cheele.

"What I thought I saw was something so extraordinary that no really sane man could dignify it with the credit of having actually happened. I was standing, the last evening I was with you, half-hidden in the hedge-growth by the orchard gate, watching the dying glow of the sunset. Suddenly I became aware of a naked boy, a bather from some neighbouring pool, I took him to be, who was standing out on the bare hill-side also watching the sunset. His pose was so suggestive of some wild faun of Pagan myth that I instantly wanted to engage him as a model, and in another moment I think I should have hailed him. But just then the sun dipped out of view, and all the orange and pink slid out of the landscape, leaving it cold and grey. And at the same moment an astounding thing happened—the boy vanished, too!"

"What! vanished away into nothing?" asked Van Cheele excitedly.

"No; that is the dreadful part of it," answered the artist; "on the open hill-side where the boy had been standing a second ago, stood a large wolf, blackish in colour, with gleaming fangs and cruel, yellow eyes. You may think——"

But Van Cheele did not stop for anything as futile as thought. Already he was tearing at top speed towards the station. He dismissed the idea of a telegram. "Gabriel-Ernest is a werewolf," was a hopelessly inadequate effort at conveying the situation, and his aunt would think it was a code message to which he had omitted to give her the key. His own hope was that he might reach home before sundown. The cab which he chartered at the other end of the railway journey bore him with what seemed exasperating

slowness along the country roads, which were pink and mauve with the flush of the sinking sun. His aunt was putting away some unfinished jams and cake when he arrived.

“Where is Gabriel-Ernest?” he almost screamed.

“He is taking the little Toop child home,” said his aunt. “It was getting so late, I thought it wasn’t safe to let it go back alone. What a lovely sunset, isn’t it?”

But Van Cheele, although not oblivious of the glow in the western sky, did not stay to discuss its beauties. At a speed for which he was scarcely geared he raced along the narrow lane that led to the home of the Toops. On one side ran the swift current of the mill-stream, on the other rose the stretch of bare hill-side. A dwindling rim of red sun showed still on the skyline, and the next turning must bring him in view of the ill-assorted couple he was pursuing. Then the colour went suddenly out of things, and a grey light settled itself with a quick shiver over the landscape. Van Cheele heard a shrill wail of fear, and stopped running.

Nothing was ever seen again of the Toop child or Gabriel-Ernest, but the latter’s discarded garments were found lying in the road, so it was assumed that the child had fallen into the water, and that the boy had stripped and jumped in, in a vain endeavour to save it. Van Cheele and some workmen who were near by at the time testified to having heard a child scream loudly just near the spot where the clothes were found. Mrs. Toop, who had eleven other children, was decently resigned to her bereavement, but Miss Van Cheele sincerely mourned her lost foundling. It was on her initiative that a memorial brass was put up in the parish church to “Gabriel-Ernest, an unknown boy, who bravely sacrificed his life for another.”

Van Cheele gave way to his aunt in most things, but he flatly refused to subscribe to the Gabriel-Ernest memorial.

ERIC AMBROSE

*The Man who Died*





## THE MAN WHO DIED

I DIED on March 17th, 1925.

I knew that it was March 17th, and I watched the expression on John Martin's face as he stood by the bed. I suppose that ability to read people's true thoughts when one is on the point of death has been responsible for those strange, incomprehensible alterations to wills and testaments which are generally considered to be the result of coercion or insanity.

I had willed all my money to John Martin, because John, of all my friends, had shown himself to be the most reliable, and I hated all my relatives. On March 17th he stood by my death-bed, and I knew that he was glad that I was dying.

I made an effort to raise myself from the pillow to tell the others that he was not to have my money—none of them would have my money—I would give it instead to the nurse, because she was the only one present who did not want to see me die, and with the exception of John Martin, the only one who cared whether I would die or not.

But I was too weak. John Martin shook his head in sympathy, and tears came into his eyes, but his heart was black—almost as black as the feeble rage which burnt within me, despite the thickness of the blanket of death which was slowly extinguishing that tiny flame of my life.

I was tired, tired of the effort I had made, and like a boxer who has thrice been sent to the boards, my brain, barely functioning under the weak pulse, cried aloud for sleep.

I struggled because the blanket had become denser, the

fire damped down, and the fatigue so intense that I thought it did not matter what happened to John Martin if only I could sleep. Then I died and I slept, for that is death. There is no difference from quotidian sleep, only it is more desirable—just before. I do not know what happened to me afterwards. I suppose they wept and prayed for me, although I hope for their sakes that they did not, because that will have made their salvation a little harder to achieve.

I know what happened to John Martin. They gave him all the money, only they took away a little—the Government I mean. John must have been angry, and he probably said to his friends that it was a crying shame that they should take away the money for which a man had slaved all his life, merely because he had committed the heinous crime of deserting the State by dying. He most certainly used the words “heinous crime” or I never knew John Martin.

I don't know why I never realised in 1928 or 1929 or during the years which followed, or even on March 18th, 1925 that I had died. There are some things which we do not understand. I suppose really, that it was even more extraordinary, that on February 21st, 1933, I should have realised that I had died. There was of course a reason for that realisation, but it does not explain it. It was a bitterly cold day, and as I walked down Gladdis Street, I muffled myself up as best I could to avoid the sleet driving into my face. That is why it was all the more strange that I should look up as I passed number 68. But I did look up, and I stopped at the ugly house, still in need of paint, the rusty iron tie holding the bulge under the top window now flaking, a bar missing from the iron gate, and the coping holding the railing, still broken.

It was then I realised that I had died, and I stood staring at the windows on the second floor, and I felt that I wanted to see inside, to know who was living in the house, to know who was using all the things which had been mine. Yes, it was an

ugly house, but it had been mine, and it had been my father's before me, and now? Now it was the house of John Martin.

I opened the gate, and it squeaked. Of course it squeaked. John Martin hadn't paid for it, his father hadn't paid for it, and he hadn't paid for its contents. Why then should he oil a squeak in the gate?

Once again there welled up in me the hatred that I had experienced in those dying moments. I mounted the steps, two of which were now broken, and I knocked on the door. For some moments there was silence, and then I heard a door slam within, and the curtain in the bay window was moved, but I was standing well within the shadow of the portico and I knew that whoever it was could not see me.

Then at last the door was opened, about a foot, and an untidy slut of a girl asked me what I wanted.

"Does Mr. Martin live here?" I asked, but I knew that he did, because only John Martin would have employed a girl who looked as slovenly as that girl. I had always realised Martin's faults, but I had condoned them because I thought that deep down he was solid.

She said "yes" and "oo are you?"

Then I hesitated because I knew I could not send a message by her, and so I said instead, "I am an old friend of Mr. Martin."

But still she held the door ajar and said: "Wot name shall I say?" Then the anger which was there inside me, and which I was barely able to control, must have shown on my face, for her head disappeared.

I waited for several minutes and then heard a man's footsteps, and I knew that they were *his* footsteps, so that for the moment my anger gave place to a pleasurable excitement, because I thought of the "happy" surprise which he would have when he saw me.

Then he came to the door and opened it a further six inches.

"Who is it?" he asked, and now I was smiling a little grimly, knowing that he could not see my face beneath the brim of my soft felt hat, for it was now very dark and the light in the hall very dim.

"Don't you remember me?" I said. I could see him peering at me, trying to make me out, but I took care that he should not see me.

"Aren't you going to ask me in?" I was enjoying his discomfiture. Still he hesitated.

"I have a message from Henry Bell."

He stood very still and for the moment did not answer. Then he spoke, and his voice seemed quieter, more restrained than when I had known him.

"He died eight years ago."

"I know," I said.

That seemed to nonplus him and again he hesitated.

"Will you come in?"

I followed him into the hall. It was strange going into that hall again. The hat-stand was still there, and the pedestal with the aspidistra, at the foot of the stairs. He led me into the front room which had been the dining-room before I died, but which was now the drawing-room. I knew it was the drawing-room, because all the furniture which had been in that room was now here.

He turned on the light. If I had not had the electric light installed in 1922 he would not have turned on the electric light—or the gas. We would have sat in the dark. There was a time when I had admired and appreciated his parsimony.

I had taken off my hat and now I faced him, waiting for the shock, waiting to see his face blanch. But still it seemed he did not recognise me, although I suppose it would have

been surprising had he done so, because eight years before, he had seen me die, had seen me buried.

"You have a message for me?" he said.

"Yes; from Henry Bell."

"When did you know Henry Bell?"

"I knew him very well—before March 17th, 1925."

"What message did he give you that he could not have given me on March 16th of that year, because you know I was with him at the end?"

"Yes. I know. I saw you."

"*You* saw me?"

"Yes. You cried. That is, there were tears in your eyes."

He looked at me sharply and the corners of his mouth contracted.

"There were only five present at the end. I have never seen you before."

Then I threw back my head and laughed, a deep, full-throated laughter, and I thought I would not be able to stop.

Now he was angry and came across to me. "What is this message you spoke to me about? I am a busy man and I shall be glad if you will take up as little of my time as possible."

I turned full on him so that I might see his face as I told him who I was.

I spoke quietly. "I am Henry Bell who died on March 17th, 1925," and I watched him, waiting to see the terror spread on his face. For a moment he stood gaping, and then it seemed that it was his turn to laugh, but from the way in which he did so, I knew that he, too, had been labouring under some strain. I let him laugh until my nerves seemed jarred to breaking-point.

"I am glad you think it funny. I hope you found it equally funny when you inherited my small fortune."

That seemed to start him off again.

"You are hysterical," I said, and I let him cackle on till at last, because all things must have an end, he stopped.

As I looked at him, I could not believe that this had once been my best friend, for now I loathed him, loathed him almost as much as I had loved him. But now when I looked at him he was not afraid, instead he was amused, seemingly genuinely amused.

"There was once a man who called himself Tichborne," he said, "and he did what you are trying to do, but *he* at least tried to make himself look something like the man he pretended to be."

That knocked me a little off my balance, for the man was entirely without a conscience. I spoke very slowly: "I think that you had better look at me again."

He did look at me, but still with that look of supercilious amusement. "I am afraid that you make a very poor Henry Bell. You see, poor old Henry was a good six inches taller than you."

"Don't you poor old Henry me," I shouted, and that took a little of the amusement from his face. "I left you all my money when I died, everything I possessed. What have you done with it all? What have you done with all my books which I collected during my life, my valueless, seemingly worthless, volumes on the *Lycopersicum esculentum*, which I treasured but at which you laughed. What have you done with my . . ."

But he cut me short, alarm on his face.

"I asked you to come in because I thought you had something to tell me. As you have not, I will say good night," and he went to the door to open it.

Then once more he allowed the sneering smile to play on his lips. "When next you try to pretend you are someone else, someone who is dead, see that you get the age roughly correct.

Henry Bell was fifty when he died, not thirty or thereabouts."

Now the black rage surged up and around me, taking complete possession of me. "You liar," I screamed, "you asked me in because you thought you might hear of something else belonging to Henry Bell which you might appropriate, something more into which you might sink your vulture's talons." Now I saw the fear in his face as he backed away, but the door was not yet open, and to get out of the room he had to come nearer to me.

I saw the fear turn to terror as I closed with him, and he felt my hands about his throat. He was a man over sixty and I . . . I felt like a young man, and there was a strength in my body such as I had almost forgotten the use of. At the time it did not strike me as unusual, only afterwards—when I let John Martin fall lifeless to the floor, did I marvel at the strength with which it seemed that rage, and rage alone, had endowed me for the passing moment.

I sat in a chair looking down at the bloated features of him whom I had once loved as a brother.

I was only surprised that he had so persistently pretended not to recognise me, for I had not changed. It was all rubbish to say that Henry Bell had been six inches taller than I. It was absurd, because I would then be five feet eight inches and shorter than John Martin, who was five feet eleven.

As I looked at Martin there came into my mind a strange thought. When I had strangled him I had looked up into his eyes and not down. He was taller than I was.

I went out into the hall to where I knew a mirror used to hang. It was still there, only now it was cracked in one corner. I looked in it at myself.

I stood back aghast, for the person who stared back at me was not me. Instead there was a young man about thirty, with dark hair, whereas mine had been grey, and I said out aloud

"My hair was grey before I died," and it sounded funny, and I laughed.

Then I went back into the room where John Martin lay, and I sat down again on the chair and looked at him. Of course he had not recognised me, but I was glad that I had killed him.

Again I asked myself what had happened to me during those eight years from March 17th, 1925, onwards, and for the first time the strangeness of the fact that I had died, yet now was alive, seemed to come to me. Where had I been those last eight years, and why was I now a young man in the full vigour of life?

So I sat and brooded, and did not hear the slut of a housemaid enter the room, her face still bearing the blacklead marks of the kitchen, until she screamed, an awful piercing shriek, and ran from the room. I suppose it must have been a terrifying sight to her, her master lying there with his head across the hearth, his mouth blood-flecked at the corners, his lips drawn back baring his teeth in that last paroxysm of agony, whilst I, a stranger, sat by him.

But her scream had the effect of bringing to me a sense of realities. I jumped to my feet, knowing that in a few moments the police would arrive and that it would be best for me to leave immediately if I was to solve the problem, the problem of myself.

I opened the front door and went out cautiously. I could hear the girl farther down the road calling out, inarticulate, but as yet there was no one in sight. I hurried away in the opposite direction.

I did not know where I should go, but I felt in my pockets and found some loose change. In a wallet I found several treasury notes of a different design from those I had known in 1925.

I went to an hotel and took a room. They asked me to



sign the register, and it was only when I was in my bath that I realised that I had signed "Henry Bell." It did not matter really, I argued, because Henry Bell was dead.

But they found me. They found me within three days. It was on the Tuesday that I killed John Martin, and on the Friday morning as I went into the hotel lounge three men approached me. One, the leader, said in a direct manner: "I want you for the murder of John Martin." Then he warned me.

I shrugged my shoulders and they took me to a waiting car outside the hotel. No one seemed to be interested—no one seemed to know what was going on.

They looked after me fairly well except that they questioned me continually for long periods. They seemed puzzled at my insistence that I was Henry Bell. They in turn insisted that I was somebody else, somebody of the name of Leslie Hibbert, and of whom I had never heard.

The newspapers gave little attention to the trial, or the long arguments which were waged about my sanity. One referred to my apparent indifference to the proceedings until Sir James Lidbern was called by the defence.

I had had several conversations with him without realising that he was a doctor, or why he came to speak to me.

But he was a sympathetic man with the eyes of a hypnotist, and I told him a great deal that I did not tell the others, and it seemed to me that he understood. That is, he *seemed* to understand at the time, but at the trial, although he spoke in my favour, he talked rubbish, and showed that he did not understand.

He told the jury that this was not a case of "dual personality" but one of "transplanted personality." It was, he thought, the first case to be actually recorded, though the thing might have happened many times in the past without being recognised.

He spoke of telepathy and thought-transference. He spoke of "force transference." He gave well-known instances of brothers who had communicated with each other over long distances. He said that there was nothing new in that. He said that when the man Henry Bell had been on the point of death, there had welled up in him a tremendous force, a force of hatred against John Martin. That was not a clever deduction on the part of Sir James, for I had told him that myself.

He went on to say that in some inexplicable manner the man Leslie Hibbert (even he insisted on calling me by that name), had had communicated to him and imposed upon him this force, the "personality force" of Henry Bell. And because personality is to a great extent the result of the life one has lived, the thoughts one has had, and the things that one has heard, so, when this force came to Leslie Hibbert, that part of his brain which received it acted like Henry Bell, thought like him, and *was* Henry Bell.

But, he went on to say, although this personality force was accepted at that moment before the death of Henry Bell, it lay dormant in the subconscious brain of Leslie Hibbert, waiting to be brought to the surface by some little memory, such as the house where Henry Bell had lived. For eight years those memories had lain tucked away, until one night a little thing had brought the whole train to the fore, swamping entirely and blotting out Leslie Hibbert whose whole history the police now knew, up to that night of the meeting with John Martin.

That, said Sir James, was what had happened to me. I was *not* Henry Bell. No one could doubt that I was not Henry Bell, for Henry Bell was dead—physically. But Henry Bell was very much alive at the moment, mentally. How long that force would last he did not know.

Counsel who was defending me was quick to follow up this absurd line of reasoning.

He referred to the verdict of "Murder but Insane." He said that that meant that the brain was the most important part of a man. No one could deny that.

If a man killed under the physical compulsion of another it was not murder. If he killed with his body, and his *mind* did not intend to kill, then it was not murder. Even if the mind killed suddenly, without previous intention, it was not murder, but manslaughter. No one denied that Leslie Hibbert had killed John Martin—but it was for the jury to determine his state of mind at the moment of killing. I listened to this amusing, if ingenious, quibble, and realised long before the judge summed up how absurd and ludicrous it all was, because *I was* Henry Bell and Henry Bell had died in 1925.

They found me guilty and sentenced me to death. The judge asked me whether I wished to make any statement. I said I did. I said: "You have found Leslie Hibbert guilty. You have shown me a woman whom you say is my wife and who says she is my wife. She is not, and never was. I am Henry Bell, and by the law of England Henry Bell should go free. But it does not matter, because I am not afraid of death in the least, for I have already died once."

The judge shrugged his shoulders, very slightly, and then proceeded to read the foolishly dramatic words.

But they cheated me in the end. Doctors came to see me and to speak to me, to listen but not to learn. Then some poor misguided fools presented a petition, and they found that I was insane and put me in the asylum from which I now write to you.

Now the days of my first summer here are lengthening, and I crave the sleep I have once experienced—the Sleep of Death.



H. A. MANHOOD

*Wish Me Luck*



## WISH ME LUCK

**E**LEVEN o'clock. The prim smell of Sunday was almost gone. Old Alice Pomeroy sat contentedly before a humming fire in the back parlour of the "True-as-Stated," talking quietly, noddingly, with her daughter-in-law, the young and sturdy wife of the absent landlord, sipping her nightly glass of a juniper punch called "Sweet Emily," perhaps because it was always brewed in a smoky brown cloam jug shaped like a caped maid.

A tabby cat rubbed solemnly against her clubbed foot as if seeking to heal it by sympathetic touch. The fire, a fighting huddle of salt timbers, sparked riotously, shaming the hanging lamp in whose glass belly the wick lay like a miserably bottled snake. China and hanging crystals glinted in a mock splintering and a ship in a bottle seemed caught in a tropic storm.

Shadows flickered in dolphin-play across the low ceiling, their antics interesting the several portraits on the wall so that they lived again briefly, nodding amusedly to each other. Supper waited at one end of the scrubbed table ; cold meat, bread and pickles and a flat saffron cake, knife-stamped with a large dee, a great cruet standing like a guardhouse in the middle.

Susan, with the help of dumb Meg, the lank, worm-lipped house-girl, had long ago tidied the bar-room and was waiting restlessly for the return of Dan Pomeroy, her husband, whom she loved deeply and deservedly with a generosity equalling his own.

Dan, following the recent death of his father and at his mother's wish, had but lately returned from America with a sensible fortune of his own and a sizeable first nugget on his watch-chain. The prospect of a gentlemanly landlording in the place of his birth pleased him very well. What better frame for the rest of his life than the "True-as-Stated" in Tuffrand Cove? A neat stone house, tight as a whelk in its place on the quay; sea and wind and shining sand and gulls galore and the moors and cliffs with hares and wildfowl for coursing and shooting. And for a wife a darling girl of the place with money in her own right and no need for crawl or quarrel between them. Here, indeed, was heaven as you make it and no mistake!

A fine figure of a Cornishman, travelled and full of a merry knowledge and sympathy, Dan's coming had provided the Cove with some amusement for, with his fine black beard and moustaches, he was the living image of Squire Haddicoat, owner of the village and twenty thousand acres besides. A small thing, you'd think, but the autocratic Squire wasn't pleased.

Not that Dan minded one scrap. Broad-mindedly he felt that he was as entitled to wear a beard as any rural lord and it only amused him when folk mistook him for a squire become genial.

Twice the Squire sent brisk word that he trusted that Dan would shave and end an unbecoming mockery. But Dan didn't see why at all. If m'lord didn't like it, well, let him part with his own beard. Which sensible refusal upset the Squire badly. Uncommonly wealthy, he was but rarely thwarted. His father and grandfather had been powerful and bearded before him, and tradition couldn't be broken.

Full power of damnation had been his till now, but in this case the power had failed lamentably, and, since the Pomeroy's owned the "True-as-Stated" and sold the best liquor



in twenty miles, there seemed nothing he could do to force obedience. He was accustomed to ride about the country-side in a shiny dandy cart with a spanking, pampered thoroughbred between the shafts, and Dan, just because it suited him and out of no malice, used a raddled ass-cart and one of the unkempt, shore-grazing asses so cherished by his mother.

Naturally the Squire took his riding in this manner as an added insult, and he schemed viciously to force Dan out of the parish. But Dan was within his rights and couldn't be hit in the pocket or anywhere else. He just went his own laughing way, preaching a bit, too, sometimes, telling what he'd seen of the beauty of earth, and that we'd enjoy it the more if we didn't crave for power or undue riches or for the beauty of a heaven which wasn't there. Which only increased Squire Haddicoat's anger and added to the jest as the villagers saw it.

Sitting with her glass held close to her stern, whiskered chin, her tight grey hair like a cap of silver, Old Alice gave gossip as she had heard it that day across the bar, Susan listening indignantly.

"What right has he to play the king?"

"No right at all," Alice answered her, sad and cross, too, to think of a blindness where clear vision should have been; "but then, right can't be measured, for it changes weight with every one of us. If we could all agree on right and wrong half the world would be out of work, and that would be wrong to start with. 'Tis strife, after all, that's the salt of living for most, and God bless the boldest."

"More's the pity."

Old Alice nodded sagely: "A whining pity, so 'tis, and no sense or good even if the Squire does choose to make a whole seething sermon out of a simple, no-matter likeness. "Those that mock shall be trampled, so sayeth the Lord" . . . that's the way he clamoured in the House to-day, so they say, fierce as Moses, and the Parson upholding him for fear he'd lose the

living. Snooks to him, I say, and best maybe if we say naught to Dan about it."

Susan shrugged, parting the heavy curtains, staring out across the bay: "I wish Dan would come," she said softly. "It shouldn't take him this long to drive home from Muryan, with a moon, too."

"Don't worry, child," Old Alice soothed her smilingly, pleased to think that Dan had such a good reason for hurry. Life had come sweet for them all, like a flower after a struggle.

To Susan the moon seemed very big and bright, slipping with plump good-humour through lacy folds of cloud, causing the sea to glimmer like a ploughing of sheer frost. The blinking harbour light was like a tiny pulsing wound in the dreaming flesh of earth and distant lights, sparking as if in sympathy, seemed to hobble nearer like cripples in excited action.

The cars loomed like great bible waves, just as if the tin mines beneath had sucked in a great, unsettling breath of air. It was very quiet after the Christmas gales, only the surf rasping like the breath of a sleeper. The air, unhurried, was alive with a purpose of its own, pure and lovely. Soon a right breeze would bring the mimosa sweetness of the Scillies like love to the mainland and the moorlands and valleys, even the stone edges would flower responsively, amazingly.

Spring already in her heart, Susan smiled to think of Dan driving along the high and lonely road across the stone-crumped moor, past rock-pools gleaming like the drip of stars and the huddled gorse brakes, moaning everlastingly as if with the pain of the birth of thorns. He'd be thinking all that she was thinking, his hat tipped back and a tiny, merry whistle on his lips, a pirate at ease on a skimming splinter as he'd say. Maybe he'd stopped at the carpenter's shop, way up at the crossroads, for a word with blind Pengelly and his son about a boat "for my wife and meself to be sailing" . . . bless him!

Her mind vivid with love, it was easy for Susan to imagine the shop standing like an ark left high and dry after the falling of the waters and the tenants still amazed at salvation ; lonely and with only an enormous chiselled guide-stone, old as comfort, for company.

Pengelly's reason for building there had been uncommonly good. A ship's carpenter in his youth, he had once been wrecked on a shark's tooth of an island in the tropics, suffering great thirst before rescue. Home again, he had remembered the unfailing spring at the crossways, the craggy-rocked basin bottomed with fine silver sand through which water bubbled ceaselessly, airily, as might the breath of a hidden monster, the sand spurting and dancing waywardly. A good reason for building. At night the long, faintly sand-frosted windows of the ship glimmered yellowly like the scuttles of a ghost ship.

The door was thick-cruled with paint, for young Pengelly tried out his colours on it, colours for boats and cradles : they made coffins, too ; they should be coloured also, black for the likes of Squire Haddicoat, sky-blue or sun-colour for Dan. . . .

Susan smiled, driving away the gruesome thought, touching her throat gently where Dan had so often kissed and nibbled it, and Old Alice, watching, smiled too, and thought she would be going aloft to her bed for it would be better for love to be alone and waiting for its likeness. In the outer bar-room a tap dripped as if marking a time of its own, and Alice felt that time did indeed run differently in the "True-as-Stated," and she thanked God for the harmony, that Dan had come home to her and married so well and faithfully.

Rising stiffly on her great stick, her club-foot dragging, she nodded towards the portrait of her husband as she always did, her thin Spanish face wrinkling wisely and affectionately. But, even as she did so, Susan moved at the window, holding a

finger for silence. Like bouncing stones in the stillness came the sound of hooves down the hill.

"He's surely making up for lost time!" Susan hurried to the door, anxious to help Dan with his stabling.

But Alice still listened, quick to notice differences: "Too leapy for Dan," she muttered, and reached for her shawl, pinning it fast with the air of one going to battle. Trouble had never yet caught her unawares. A late-running horse meant something unpleasant in her experience, a call for the doctor or something similar. A tiny fear snatched at her heart, but she put it bravely aside. Wheels bumped on the cobbles and, almost at once, there was a rapping on the front door. A dog barked near at hand and a voice damned it.

"Squire Haddicoat!" Old Alice sucked apprehensively, following Susan through the doorway, the gaping Meg after her, her hands wrapped in her apron. The sweating horse backed nervously as they turned the corner, but an angry word from the Squire checked it. He was knocking again at the door with the butt of his whip as he sat.

"Well?" Old Alice lost no time.

Squire Haddicoat lowered his whip, teeth grinning sourly white in his beard.

"There has been an accident. I ran into Pomeroy on the hill. My horse was scared and trampled down on him. You had better go and look."

Susan said nothing. Her eyes widened with sudden fear. Catching at Meg she ran with her away up the hill, their shadows grotesque in the moonlight. Old Alice stood grimly, resting on her stick, breathing hard. She thought of Dan dead through malice, remembering queerly the agony of his birth so long ago. Her thoughts spun crazily, then righted themselves, settling icily. A strength came to her as if her dead husband were warm and living at her side. "Accident be damned," she thought. The Squire was watching her

amusedly, pleased to have settled a score. Recovered, Alice bobbed her head cunningly :

"Thank you for bringing the news. It must have shaken you a bit. I'll get some brandy. . . ."

It was on the tip of the Squire's tongue to tell her to go to hell ; he'd slammed the old harridan's son as he deserved, but it wouldn't do for the old crow to guess that he'd done it deliberately. It would be prudent to humour her.

"If it won't be troubling you too much," he said with cynical politeness. A tot would certainly be acceptable after that trampling. Just like a damned grinning evil reflection of himself the fellow had been, God rot him ! No one would dare to accuse him of criminal malice, especially after the kindly way he'd brought the news.

Grimly Old Alice hobbled back into the hourse, returning with a bottle of brandy and a glass. The glass she filled and handed to the Squire.

"Wish me luck !" she said.

Off-handedly the Squire did so, drinking appreciatively and, as his head tipped, Old Alice braced herself, lifting her heavy stick, swinging it hard on the back of his neck above the astrakhan collar. Gruntingly he flopped forward, the glass falling splinteringly. Swiftly Alice swamped brandy over him, ramming the bottle into his pocket.

Then she used her stick again, this time upon the horse so that it lunged and galloped madly along the quay. Alice waited. The horse reared on the brink, but too late to prevent a fall. There was a wrenching crash and splash. Then complete silence. Knowing the way of the rocks under the quay, Alice did not need to doubt. Carefully rubbing the knob of her stick on her shawl she went back into the house, standing before the portrait of her husband, drawing comfort from his calm, approving gaze. A rub of spirit on her bloodless cheeks

and she hurried through the village to the house of the doctor, knocking him up.

"Hurry ! Hurry ! A terrible mess. Our Dan trampled. Squire Haddicoat raving drunk and fallen over the quay. . . Don't bother about your tie, man !"

Stiff-lipped in her fear, Old Alice hurried pantingly back, her stick banging loudly on the cobbles. If Dan was gone the sun might just as well be dead too. Meg and Susan were pulling the broken-shafted ass-cart to the door of the "True-as-Styled."

Dan lay limply, bloody-cheeked. Susan was white-faced, wooden-fingered in her misery. Meg gabbled and clucked excitedly. Gently the three of them carried Dan into the house, Alice finding a special brandy, pouring water. Susan lifted the heavy head, opening the tight, full lips, the brandy glass rattling against the wide, lucky teeth . . . please God, their luck held good this time. Lightly she dabbed at the slashed flesh, listening, nodding tremulously, whispering in her relief.

"It's all right."

"God be praised !"

Old Alice unlocked her hands thankfully, hobbling to a seat, very tired and grateful, without regret. Meg bubbled noisily as she unlaced Dan's boots. A little more brandy and Dan gulped and sighed and blinked, struggling weakly upright. Aware of Susan and his mother, he grimaced quaintly :

"A bit of an accident," he said.

"Accident ?"

Dan was forced to admit that it was hardly that.

Old Alice nodded contentedly, smiling up at the portrait on the wall. Just like his father, Dan was, honest to a fault. Well, there'd be peace for all of them and no more malice. A pleasant gift. Wish me luck ! Chuckling deeply, she blessed them all before hobbling away to bed.

JAMES HILTON

*Lives of Men*





## LIVES OF MEN

THE Kanaka screwed on the helmet, leaning well over the side to do so ; and Saung Lo, for perhaps the tenthousandth time in his life, dived gently backwards into the warm ocean.

“Not a bad little feller, for a Malay,” remarked the Australian boss to his visitor from the mainland. “Only you can’t get him to realise that the stuff don’t fetch what it used to. Except for this partic’ler job, y’know, these boys ain’t got much headpiece.”

Meanwhile Saung Lo was sinking slowly through the green translucent fathoms. His airpipe and life-line trailed above him, the used air escaping by the outlet-valve in a succession of explosive bubbles. A strange apparition he was, though a familiar one, in these waters—the round steel helmet, the bulging canvas and rubber clothing, the brown hands, naked from the wrist, holding lifeline and shell-net. And these hands were small and sweetly shaped as a woman’s. They matched, for delicacy, the brown face screened by the steel and plate-glass.

Saung Lo, in fact, was but twenty-one years old, though he had been diving for years. Born on a Sumatra plantation, he had drifted south after the rubber boom, to find at last a job he could do that white men would always pay him for. He himself did not profess to understand the whys and wherefores of it ; he only knew that he could earn money by groping in deep levels for pearl shell, apart from the prospect of finding

an occasional pearl. He had had such luck on several occasions, and had made extra money.

He did not know that the sum paid him was less than a hundredth of the price that the pearl eventually fetched in the shops of Bond Street or Fifth Avenue. He did not know that his Australian boss traded for two hundred per cent profit with an American firm that made a similar profit. He did not know that the Jap storekeeper who sold beer and tinned provisions systematically cheated him.

And since there were so many simple things that he did not know, it was not perhaps surprising that he couldn't be got to realise the world slump, the fall in commodity prices, and the need for him to dive twice as often and bring up twice the quantity of shell for the same reward.

Yet there were, on the other hand, a few odd things that Saung Lo did know.

He knew, for instance, the bottom of the sea. He knew the geography of a small patch of ocean floor near Thursday Island as well as most men know their own town or village. He knew the clefts and shelves of that strange under-sea world, the twilight green of coral caverns, the shadowed haunts of creatures hardly to be described in any words of his own. He knew where this secret continent steepened into depths where he could never explore ; often he walked to the brink and stared into the dark vastness ; he felt it was his own discovery, and when afterwards he regained the surface the thought comforted him even if the contents of his shell-net fetched a disappointing price.

He was proud that he could descend farther than any other diver he had ever heard of—ten, twenty, even thirty fathoms, to a depth where he dare not stay more than a few moments because of a gripping numbness that came into his limbs. He did not know that this was caused by a pressure of scores of pounds' weight upon every inch of his body ; his science was as deficient as his economics.

But he well knew the major symptoms of danger, and he knew also what those dangers were. He had seen men die of diver's paralysis, yelling in hideous agonies throughout the warm island nights; and he knew from his own experience that if he stayed down too long, or descended too quickly, gouts of blood would trickle out of his ears and nose, and he would feel as if an iron bar were being clamped across his forehead and tightened.

But he did not worry. It was his job. And as the gently swelling current drifted him into the depths, he would have had no misgivings at all but for that mystifying business of the price-level. "What's the matter him big feller shell not get plenty good money put longa bank, heh?" had been his protest at the time of the last reckoning with the boss. And the Australian's reply, given with a laugh, had been one that Saung Lo had completely failed to understand.

But as usual, his remote and private world consoled him. There were two dreams in his mind—the one quite practical, a matter of saving up enough money "longa bank" to return north some day and marry a girl of his own race; but this happy consummation was fast receding in prospect now that his earnings could scarcely keep up with the Jap storekeeper's ingenuity in framing his account.

Curious—however much he tried Saung Lo could never quite get out of debt to the wily trader, and as long as he was in debt he would not be allowed to leave Thursday Island. The system worked perfectly—more perfectly than Saung Lo realised. But there was always his other dream, which was a mystical one—a deep tranquillising concept of the waters under the earth, of a world untouched by other men, of secrets he alone could probe.

Cautiously, as he descended, he looked about him, sensing anew the magic of his dream. He felt the air reaching him in small regular gusts; the deep sea was calm, as it always was,

yet with a peculiar additional calmness that came from a smooth surface and sunny skies. One of the odd things that Saung Lo knew was to forecast the weather; he would often amuse the Australian by coming up with a prophecy of "plenty big strong feller wind." And he was almost always right.

But the Australian did not believe him when he said that he learned it from the fish. But again Saung Lo was right. Indeed, on that populated sea-floor he was more learned than many professors of oceanography. He had observed over and over again, the quick, uneasy movements of all kinds of marine creatures when bad surface weather impended. And sometimes, before especially severe storms, he had seen even stranger sights there below—weird existences of pulp and blubber, straying out of their proper depth as if in some fretful agitation—fantastic shadows, half fish, half vegetable, that broke through the long green corridors.

No use describing them to the Australian; he would not believe; he was of the other upper world. But Saung Lo believed, because he had seen, and because on more than one occasion he had been in danger through the entanglement of his airpipe with one of these perambulating mysteries.

Saung Lo was quite happy when he felt his thick rubber boots touching the coral. There was a buzzing in his ears and a prickling behind his eyes—slight discomforts he had long grown used to. He knew exactly where he was—on the slope of a rocky shelf that fell away into the abyss. He looked around him, recognising the scene. Fish of many kinds passed him by, like phosphorescent gleams in the twilight; but he took no notice of them, he had his work to do, and he could not further delay.

Signalling with his lifeline, he began to stride over the rough sea-bed, while the lugger drifted with the current far

above him. It was hard work, and it made him very tired. He forced his way over mounds of coral, scrambling on to ledges and down again into deep fissures, lifting the smaller rocks to peer behind them—his mind automatically intent on a dozen dangers, but his eyes searching all the time for shell, and his soul quite reasonably at ease. He did not mind this job, if only he could make enough money.

As it happened, he was more than usually lucky. Soon his net was full of slabs of pearl-shell as big as soup-plates ; a good haul, and worth "plenty money," if only the Australian would pay him properly. He was glad, too, because he felt increasingly tired and his head ached ; if only he could have more luck like this he would not need to dive so many times a day.

He did not mind diving for a living, but he didn't like the way his head ached when he had been down too often. Now that his net was full he pulled on the lifeline and gave the signal that he was about to ascend. He would not, he decided, go down again that day. And it was then, amid such weary satisfaction, that he felt his whole body re-transfixed into tension by a sight that faced him a few yards away. It was the swinging shadow of the biggest shark he had ever seen.

Saung Lo, of course, had met a good many of these unpleasant creatures. He was not more than half afraid of them. He knew that they did not often attack a fully-clothed diver, being scared by the forbidding appearance of his helmet and inflated clothes, as well as by the constant out-bubbling of air from the escape-valve. A diver, however, would act prudently in their neighbourhood ; they had an instinct for flesh, and there was always risk of a vicious plunge at a naked hand.

Saung Lo watched the monster as warily, therefore, as the monster was watching him. On this occasion he did, perhaps, feel more than half afraid—the shark was so huge, and he himself was not at his best after a day of successive dives.

Still, he knew the proper technique of these encounters, and he was far from getting into a panic.

He flapped with his arms against the heavy water, making as much commotion as he could, and at the same moment he closed the air-valve to assist his ascent. The shark, disconcerted by these manœuvres, sheered off a little, then followed well behind. Saung Lo expected this, and was not surprised to find the distance between them gradually diminishing. Curiosity overcomes fear—it was the law of men as well as of sharks.

When the creature was again a few yards away Saung-Lo reopened his air-valve and caused a rapid volley of bubbles to detonate into the water ; this lost him a little of his height, but it served to scare away the shark once more. It might, with luck, have scared the marauder away altogether, but such luck was not Saung Lo's. After his big haul of pearl-shell he could not, perhaps, expect it. But he might reasonably have expected the shark to be scared for more than a few seconds.

Unfortunately, it wasn't. It came on after him again with redoubled curiosity, only to be scared afresh by a new out-flow of air-bubbles. And suddenly Saung Lo, with that head-piece of his which the Australian had so often derided, realised that his life most probably depended on that running battle between fear and curiosity. For he noted that each time the air-bubbles spouted they had a smaller effect upon the threshing fins and the wide, half-gaping mouth. Even in the very eyes of his adversary Saung Lo imagined he could read a puzzlement that was rapidly becoming contemptuous.

And now, with passion, he wished that his limbs were completely free. If he could, he would have thrown away his diving-dress and air-pipe and flung himself to the surface. His slim, naked body was like oiled silk, and he felt confident that he could dodge a shark, for he was a superb swim-diver.

He felt that his cumbersome garments, though physically a protection, were in too many ways a handicap, and he doubted, before many moments had passed, whether he could reach the surface before the shark had conquered its fear and had reached him.

Still he watched, feeling the lift of his body through the lightening water, sensing the nearness of the great fish as it circled around. He could see the rows of serrated teeth in the open jaws, and the large, unswerving eyeballs. These were the perils of that secret world that was his own; he must fight, and fight to the last. He had once battled with an octopus, and several times he had had obscure struggles with things he could not name; but this was his first enemy shark—the first of the species that he had not easily scared away.

Through the glass panes of his helmet he viewed it with a warm bodily fear, yet still with his mind racing sweet and cool. He must fight. It would come to that in a moment, and to be ready for it, with his two hands, he dropped his loaded net of pearl-shell and drew from an outside pocket a knife that he used for prising open the shells. It was a good knife. But he was sorry to have had to let go the net.

Suddenly the jaws leapt at him, and he felt their sawlike teeth grate on the metal of his helmet and drag down to his shoulder and arm. The graze was tentative, experimental, and insufficient to break through the canvas and rubber. But it was enough to make contact in Saung Lo with something that fused mind and body into elemental decision.

He swung his arm and struck with the knife into an obstruction that was apparently hard and impervious; yet with such effect that in an instant the whole under-sea world was alive with leaping and lashing fury. His vision darkened; he could not see anything at all; he was buffeted about in sudden currents; once the rough, scaly carcase struck him like the blow of a huge fist and lifted him high.

His mind still functioned ; he knew that he must, amidst all these commotions, preserve the thin tube through which the air reached his lungs . . . he must postpone, somehow, the discovery of flesh and blood behind the steel and rubber. He waited, half-blind, with the knife poised in his hand. His head was bursting, but he felt his body dissolve in a fear that was partly an ecstasy ; he was alive, as the shark was alive ; they were both of them leaping, living things. And then, in sudden blood-fury, he ran amok—slashing and rending and stabbing as so many of his race were won't to do on land. . . .

An hour later, on board the lugger, the Australian stooped with some curiosity over the prone figure of Saung Lo. He had been hauled aboard unconscious, though apparently uninjured. Strangely, however, he had lost his shell-net.

Saung Lo regained consciousness, but he did not tell the Australian about the shark. It was the sort of thing the Australian would laugh at and only half believe. He just said, in the clipped pidgin English he had learned from the Kanakas : "Plenty big feller shell down below, Tuan. Bimeby I fetch him to-morrow."

But by the morrow Saung Lo was dead—of heart-failure.

"It gets most of 'em sooner or later," commented the Australian philosophically to his visitor from the mainland. "All these fellers stay down too long and go down too quick—and it's no use warning 'em, they don't take any heed. . . . Not a bad little feller for a Malay, but a dam' fool when all's said and done. . . ."

Ten thousand miles away, about the same time, another man died of heart-failure. He was seventy-five years old, a millionaire, and head of the great firm of Amalgamated Ocean Products, Inc. Indirectly he employed Saung Lo, though



neither had ever heard of the other's existence. For some weeks before his death this old man had been trying to frame a merger between his company and a rival one, with a view to economies in the production and marketing of pearl-shell. He attended a board meeting in defiance of his doctor's orders ; he made speeches, drafted figures, and went to Chicago for a conference. Then he died suddenly one night, in his sleep.

All the newspapers had columns about him and about the wonderful work he had done for the pearl industry. One of them said : "It would be no exaggeration to say that he gave his life for it."



EDGAR WALLACE

*White Stockings*



## WHITE STOCKINGS

**J**OHN TREVOR was not a jealous man. He told himself this a dozen times.

He told Marjorie Banning only once.

"Jealous!" she flamed, and then, gaining control of her anger, "I don't quite understand you."

"Jealous, of course, is a silly word to use, but," he blundered, "what I mean is suspicious——"

They were sitting in the park under an expansive elm.

"What I mean to say is," said Jack, desperately, "I trust you, dear, and—well, I don't want to know your secrets, but——"

"But——?" she repeated coldly.

"Well, I merely remark that I have seen you three times driving in a swagger motor-car——"

"A client's car," she said, quietly.

"But surely the dressing of people's hair does not occupy all the afternoon and evening," he persisted. "Really, I'm awfully sorry if I'm bothering you, but it is a fact that whenever I've seen you it has been on the days when you have told me you could not come to me in the evening."

He was making it very hard for her, and she resented—bitterly resented—not only his doubt and the knowledge that in his eyes her movements were suspicious, but that she could offer no explanation.

"Who has been putting these ideas in your head?" she asked. "Lennox Mayne?"

"Lennox!" he snorted. "How ridiculous you are, Marjorie. Lennox would not dream of saying anything against you, to me or anybody else. Lennox is very fond of you. Why, Lennox introduced me to you."

She bit her lips thoughtfully. She had excellent reasons for knowing that Lennox was very fond of her—fond in the way that Lennox had been of so many chance-met shopgirls.

She was employed at a great West End hairdressers, and hated the work; indeed, hated the work more than the necessity for working. Her father, a small provincial doctor, had died a few years before, leaving her and her mother penniless. A friend of the family had known the proprietor of Fennetts, and old Fennett was in need of a secretary. She had come to what Lennox Mayne crudely described as the "woman's barbers" in that capacity. From secretary she had passed to a more practical side of the business, for the old man, a master of his craft, had initiated her into the mysteries of "colour culture."

"I'm awfully sorry that I've annoyed you," she said, primly, as she got up, "but we shopgirls have our duties, Jack."

"For heaven's sake don't call yourself a shopgirl," he snapped. "Of course, dear, I quite accept your explanation—only, why make a mystery of it?"

Suddenly she slipped her arm in his.

"Because I am paid to make a mystery of it," she said with a smile. "Now take me to 'Fragianas,' for I'm starving."

Over the meal they returned to the subject of Lennox.

"I know you don't like him," said Jack. "He really is a good fellow, and, what is more, he is very useful to me, and I cannot afford to lose useful friends. We were at Rugby together, but, of course, he was always a smarter chap than I. He has made a fortune while I am struggling to get together the necessary thousand that will enable me to introduce you to that home——"

"You're a darling," she said, "but I hope you will never make your money as Lennox has made his. We hear queer stories, we dyers of ladies' faded locks, and Lennox is well known in London as a man who lives by his wits."

"But his uncle——" he began.

"His uncle is very rich, but hates Lennox. Everybody says so."

"That is where you're wrong," said Jack, triumphantly. "They have been bad friends, but now they are reconciled. I was dining with Lennox last night, and he told me that the old man was most friendly now. And, what is more," he lowered his voice confidentially, "he is putting me in the way of making a fortune."

"Lennox?" said the girl, incredulously.

She and Lennox Mayne had met at the house of a mutual friend, and then they had met again in the park, as she and Jack were meeting, and Lennox had discovered a future for her which had certain material advantages and definite spiritual drawbacks. And then one Sunday, when he had taken her on the river, they had met Jack Trevor, and she had found it increasingly easy to hold at bay the philanthropist.

They strolled back to the park as the dusk was falling, and, entering the Marble Arch gate, they passed an untidy, horsey little man who touched his hat to Jack and grinned broadly.

"That is Willie Jeans," said Jack, with a smile. "His father was our groom in the old Royston days. I wonder what he is doing in London?"

"What is he?" she asked, curiously.

"He is a tout—a man who watches race-horses. Willie is a very clever watcher."

"How queer!" she said, and laughed.

## II

The man who sprawled motionless along the top of the wall had certain strange chameleon-like characteristics. His mottled green coat and his dingy, yellow breeches and gaiters so completely harmonised with the ancient wall and its overhanging trees that nine passers-by out of ten would have failed to notice him. Happily for his peace of mind, there were no passers-by, the hour being seven o'clock on a sunny May morning. His elbows were propped on a patch of crumbling mortar, a pair of prismatic glasses were glued to his eyes, and on his face was a painful grimace of concentrated attention.

For twenty minutes he had waited in this attitude, and the stout man who sat in the car drawn up some distance along the road sighed patiently. He turned his head as he heard the descent of the watcher.

"Finished?" he asked.

"Huh," replied the other.

The stout man sighed again and set the rattling machine running toward the village.

Not until they were on the outskirts of Baldock did the dingy watcher regain his speech.

"Yamen's lame," he said. "He went lame when the gallop was half-way through. He'll win no Derby."

The fat man breathed heavily. They were brothers, Willie the younger, and Paul the elder.

The car jerked to a stop before the Baldock post office, and Willie got out thoughtfully. He stood for some time meditating upon the broad pavement. Presently he climbed back into the car.

"Let's go down to the garage and get some juice on board," he said.

"Why?" asked the astounded brother. "I thought you were going to wire——"



"Never mind what you thought," said the other impatiently ; "go and load up with petrol. You can take me to London. The post office won't be open for half an hour."

As the rattling car came back to the Stevenage road Willie condescended to explain.

"If I send a wire from here it will be all over the town in a few minutes," he said, libellously. "Mr Mayne would never forgive me."

Lennox Mayne was the principal source of the tout's income. Mr. Jeans's profession was a curious one. He was what is described as "a man of observation," and he had his headquarters at Newmarket.

When his chief patron required information which could not be otherwise secured, Mr. Jeans travelled afar to the Wiltshire Downs, to Epsom, and elsewhere in order to gain at first hand knowledge of certain horses' wellbeing.

"It was a bit of luck," he mused, as he went along. "I don't suppose there is another man in England who could have touted old Greyman's horses. He usually has half a dozen men patrolling along the road."

Stuart Greyman owned a large estate on the Royston road which was peculiarly adapted for so furtive and secretive a man, for a high wall surrounded the big park wherein his horses were trained.

The old man was something of a terror to the ring. He produced unexpected winners, and so well kept was his secret that, until the race was over and the money began to roll back from the starting-price offices there was not the slightest hint that the victor was "expected."

The dust-stained car came to a stop in a decorous London square, and an outraged butler who answered the door hesitated for some considerable time before he announced the visitors.

Lennox Mayne was at breakfast, a sleek-looking young man who was less disconcerted than his butler at the spectacle of the untidy Mr. Jeans.

"Sit down," he said curtly; and when the visitors obeyed and the butler had closed the door, "Well?"

Willie poured forth his story, and Lennox Mayne listened with a thoughtful frown.

"The old devil!" he said softly.

Lennox sat for a moment deep in thought, and then——

"Now, Jeans, you understand that this is a secret. Not a whisper of Yamen's lameness must leak out. I might tell you that ten minutes ago my uncle rang me up from Baldock to say that he had galloped Yamen and he had pulled up fit."

"What?" said the indignant Willie. "Why, that horse is as lame——"

"I don't doubt it," interrupted his employer, "but Mr. Greyman has a good reason for putting it about that Yamen is sound. He has heavily backed the horse to win the Derby, and he wants time to save his money. What other horses were in the gallop?"

"I don't know his horses very well," explained Willie, "but the colt that made all the running was a smasher if ever there was one. He simply carried the rest of the horses off their feet."

"You're sure it was Yamen that pulled up lame?"

"Sure, sir," said the other emphatically. "There is no mistaking his white legs. You don't often see a brown horse with four white stockings."

"What kind of a horse was it that won the gallop?"

"He was brown all over; not a speck of white on him."

"H'm," mused Mr. Mayne, "that must be Fairyland. I must remember him. Thank you for coming," he said, as he dismissed his visitors with a nod, "and remember——"

"Mum's the word," said Willie as he folded up the two bank-notes which his employer had pushed across the table.

Left alone, Mr. Lennox Mayne did some quick, intensive thinking. He was a gambler, and a successful gambler. He gambled on stocks—on horses ; but in the main his success was due to backing and laying against human beings. In this latter respect he had made two *faux pas*. He had gambled not only upon the tolerance, but upon the inferior intelligence of his maternal uncle, Stuart Greyman. He had used information given to him in secret by that reticent man, and, to his consternation, had been detected, and there had been an estrangement which had lasted five years, and had apparently ended when old Greyman met him one day at lunch and gruffly notified his forgiveness.

"The old devil," he murmured, admiringly, "he nearly sold me !"

For old Greyman had told him again in confidence to back Yamen for the Derby.

Lennox Mayne trusted no man. Therefore he had sent his tout to confirm the exalted story of the dark Yamen's amazing speed. Yamen had only run twice as a two-year-old. He had been carefully nursed for his classic engagements, and at least the story which the old man had told him was plausible. Luckily, Lennox had not wagered a penny on the information which his uncle had brought him. If Greyman had been one of his failures, no less had Marjorie Banning. She had seemed so easy.

It was a coincidence that, as his mind dwelt upon her the telephone bell rang shrilly and the voice of John Trevor greeted him. He heard the name and made a wry face, but his voice was pleasant enough.

"Hullo, Jack. Certainly, come round. Aren't you working to-day ? Good."

He hung up the receiver and returned to his table. Jack Trevor! His eyes narrowed. He had not forgiven this innocent friend of his. Jack had a fairly good post in a city office, and just at that time the rubber trade was one of England's decaying industries, and his time was very much his own. Lennox received him in his study, and pushed a silver box of cigarettes toward his visitor.

"What brings you west at this hour?" he asked. "You'll stay to lunch?"

Jack shook his head.

"The fact is," he blurted, "I'm a bit worried, Lennox—it is about Marjorie."

"What has Marjorie been doing?" Lennox asked. "Does she want to turn your hair a flaming gold?"

"Not so bad as that," Jack said, "but I know you are very fond of Marjorie. Either she has a mysterious friend or she has a mysterious job. Four times she has passed me in the street in a most swagger car."

"Alone?"

Jack nodded.

"Perhaps she was going to see a client," suggested the other, carelessly. "You know, even women who own luxurious motor cars need the service of a trained perruquier."

"Even females who own luxurious motor-cars do not require the services of a perruquier from three in the afternoon until eleven at night," said Jack, grimly; "and that is the time Marjorie has returned to her diggings. I know it was hateful to spy on her, but that is just what I've done. She is getting a lot of money. I had a chat with her landlady—I called in on the pretence that I had come to see Marjorie—and got her to talk, and she told me that she changed a hundred-pound cheque for her."

"H'm," said Lennox. He was as puzzled as his friend. His agile brain was busy, and presently he said:

"There is certain to be a simple explanation, my dear chap, so don't worry. Marjorie is not flighty, whatever else she is. When are you going to get married?"

Jack shrugged his shoulders.

"Heaven knows," he said. "It is all very well for you to talk about marriage, because you're a rich man, but for me it means another twelve months of saving."

"Have you fixed the sum on which you can get married?" asked Lennox.

"A thousand pounds," replied Jack, "and I've got about six hundred towards it."

"Then, my dear chap, I'll put you in the way of getting not a thousand but ten thousand."

"What the dickens are you talking about?"

"I'm talking about the dark Yamen," said Lennox, "my uncle's horse. I told you the other day that I would make your fortune; I am going to do it."

He got up, went to a table, and took up the morning paper, turning its pages.

"Here is the betting," he said, "100 to 6 Yamen; and Yamen is as certain to win the Derby as you are to marry your nice little girl. I can get you ten thousand to six hundred to-day; to-morrow the price may be shorter."

"Good lord, I couldn't lose six hundred pounds!" gasped Jack.

"If you knew how small a risk it was you wouldn't yammer like a sheep."

"Suppose I had sixty pounds on it——?"

"Sixty pounds," sneered the other. "My dear chap, what is the use of making money in pennies? Here is the chance of your lifetime, and unless you are a lunatic you will not miss it. To-morrow the horse will be nearer six to one than sixteen, and you can lay out your money and stand to win a fortune at practically no risk to yourself."

He spoke for half an hour on horses—of Yamen, its speed, its breeding—and Jack listened, fascinated.

“I’ll ring up a bookmaker and put it on for you.”

“Wait, wait,” said Jack, hoarsely, as the other reached for the telephone. “It is a fearful lot of money to risk, Lennox.”

“And a fearful lot of money to win,” said the tempter. If he had had more time he would have arranged the bet so that the six hundred pounds fell into his pocket, but that was impossible. Jack Trevor must be caught immediately or not at all—must be given no time to reflect or to seek advice, and certainly no time to discover that Yamen was a cripple. The secret might leak out at any moment. The loss of six hundred might not prevent a contemptuous little hairdressing girl from marrying ; it would certainly postpone the event.

“I’ll do it,” said Jack, with a gasp, and listened as in a dream to his placid companion’s voice.

“Put it to the account of Mr. John Trevor, Castlemaine Gardens. Yes, I’ll be responsible. Thank you.”

He hung up the receiver and looked round at the other with a queer smile.

“I congratulate you,” he said softly, and Jack went back to the city, his head in a whirl.

Marjorie Banning heard the news and dropped into a two-penny park chair.

“You’ve put all the money on a horse ?” she said hollowly. “Oh, Jack !”

“But, my dear,” said Jack stoutly, “the money is as good as mine, and all that Lennox said is true. The horse was sixteen to one yesterday, and it is only eight to one to-day.

“It is all right, Marjorie,” he added, with poorly simulated cheerfulness, “the horse belongs to Lennox Mayne’s uncle. He told Lennox that it is certain to win. Think what ten thousand pounds means. Marjorie dear——”

She listened unconvinced. She who knew with what

labour and sacrifice his little nest egg had been gathered, who understood even more clearly than he what its loss would entail, could only sit with a blank sense of despair at her heart.

At that moment Mr. Lennox Mayne was experiencing something of her dismay, though the cause was a little different. Summoned by telegram, he who had been described as the "Prince of Touts" had come post-haste to Manchester Square, and whilst the grimy Ford, with its stout, hen-like driver stood at the door, Mr. Willie Jeans fidgeted uneasily and endured with such patience as he could command the flow of his employer's abuse.

"You're a blundering jackass, and I was a fool to hire you," stormed Lennox Mayne. "What is the use of touting a horse if you're seen touting? I told you that you were not to let anybody know that you were connected with me, you drivelling fool, and you've been talking."

"No, I ain't," said the other indignantly. "I never talk."

"You've been talking. Listen to this."

Lennox snatched up a letter from the table.

"This is from my uncle. Listen to this, you damned fool :

You are not satisfied with my information, it seems, but employ your tout to spy on my training. You can tell Mr. Willie Jeans from me that if ever he is again seen in or near my estate he will get the biggest flogging he has ever had in his life."

"I never knew anybody saw me. There was nobody about when I was on the wall," grumbled Mr. Jeans. "I've earned my fifty if ever a man has earned it."

"You'll get no fifty from me," said Lennox. "I've given you as much money as you're entitled to, and don't come near me again."

When Mr. Willie Jeans joined his brother he was in no amiable frame of mind.

"Where are we going now?" asked that placid man.

Willie suggested a place which has the easiest and most varied of routes, and his brother, who was not unused to these temperamental outbursts, held on his way, for their original destination had been to Epsom. A policeman at Hyde Park raised a warning hand at the sight of the ramshackle machine, but Mr. Willie Jeans's flivver was a "private car" within the meaning of the Act, and they joined the resplendent procession of machines that were moving slowly through the park. It was fate that made the oil lubrication choke within a dozen paces of where two disconsolate lovers were sitting.

"What a queer car," said the girl, "and isn't that the man you saw the other day—the tout, did you call him?"

"Yes," said Jack, gloomily, "that's the tout," and then suddenly, "I wonder if he knows."

He rose and walked across to the man, and Willie touched his cap.

"Good evening, Mr. Trevor."

"Where are you going?" asked Jack.

"I'm going to Epsom to watch the Derby gallops. Most of the horses are there now, but," he grinned unpleasantly, "not Yamen!"

"Why isn't he there?" asked Jack, with a sickening heart.

"Because he'll never see a racecourse, that's why," said the other, savagely.

"What do you mean?" asked Jack.

"He is lame," said the little man. "I hope you haven't backed him?"

Jack nodded.

"Come over here," he said. "This is pretty bad news I've heard, Marjorie," he said. "Jeans says that Yamen is lame."



"That's right," nodded the tout. "As lame as old Junket. That is another one of Mr. Greyman's."

"I don't know much about horses," said Jack. "I want you to tell me about Yamen. How long has it been lame?"

"Three days," said the little man. "I have been touting it for a week. It broke down in the winding-up gallop."

"But does Mr. Greyman know?"

"Mr. Greyman!" said the little man, scornfully. "Why, of course he knows. He didn't let on to Lennox Mayne, but I told Lennox Mayne, and a fat lot of thanks I got for it."

"When did you tell him?" asked Jack, going white.

"The day before yesterday."

"Then Lennox Mayne knew!"

Jack was bewildered.

"It can't be true," he said. "Lennox would never——"

"Lennox Mayne would give away his own aunt," said Willie Jeans, contemptuously.

"Was it Lennox Mayne who persuaded you to back this horse?" asked the girl.

Jack nodded.

"You are sure Yamen is lame?"

"I swear to it. I know Yamen as I know the back of my hand," said the little man, emphatically. "The only horse with four white stockings in the Baldock stable."

"Baldock!" The girl was on her feet, staring. "Baldock, did you say?"

"That's right, Miss."

"Who lives there?" she asked, quickly.

"Greyman."

"What sort of a man is he?"

"He is an old man about sixty, grey-haired and as hard as a nail."

She was silent a long time after the little man had gone on his shaky way, and then, most unexpectedly, she asked :

"Will you take me to see the Derby, Jack?"

"Good lord, I didn't expect you'd be interested!" he said.

"Will you take me? You can hire a car for the day, and we could see the race from the roof. Will you take me?"

He nodded, too dumbfounded to speak. She had never before evinced the slightest interest in a horse-race.

### III

Some rumour of the dark Yamen's infirmity must have crept out, for on the morning of the race the horse was quoted amongst the twenty-five to one brigade, and hints of a mishap appeared in the morning Press.

Marjorie had never been to a race meeting before, and possibly even the more sedate meetings would have astonished her, but Epsom was a revelation.

"There are all sorts of rumours about," said Jack, returning from his tour of discovery. "They say that Yamen doesn't run. The papers prepared us for that. I am horribly afraid, dear, I've been a fool."

She bent down as she stood on the roof of the car and took his hand, and to his amazement he discovered she had left paper in it.

"What's this, a bank-note? Are you going to have a bet?"

She nodded.

"I want you to make a bet for me," she said.

"What are you backing?"

"Yamen," she replied.

"Yamen!" he repeated, incredulously, and then looked at the note. It was for a hundred pounds.

"But you mustn't do this."

"Please," she insisted, firmly.

He made his way to Tattersall's ring, and after the race

preliminary to the Derby had been run, he approached a bookmaker whose name he knew.

"I got two thousand to a hundred for you," he said, "and I nearly didn't."

"I should have been very angry with you if you hadn't," said Marjorie.

"But why——" he began, and then broke off as the frame of the number-board went up. "*Yamen is running*," he said.

Nobody knew better than the girl that Yamen was running. She watched the powder-blue jacket in the preliminary parade and caught a glimpse of the famous white stockings of Mandarin's son as he cantered down to the post. Her arm was aching with the labour of holding the glasses, but she never took them off the powder-blue jacket until the white tape flew upward.

The blue jacket was third as the horses climbed the hill, fourth on the level by the railway turn, third again as the huge field ran round Tattenham Corner into the straight, and then a strident voice from a nearby bookmaker shouted :

"Any odds you like bar Yamen. I'll lay twenty to one bar Yamen."

The dark Yamen took the lead and won, hard held, by three lengths.

"I don't know how to begin the story," she said that night. They were dining together, but Marjorie was hostess.

"It really began about a month ago, when an old gentleman came into the shop and saw Mr. Fennett, the proprietor. They were together about ten minutes, and then I was sent for to the private office.

"Mr. Fennett told me that the gentleman had a special commission, and he wanted an expert to undertake some dyeing work. I didn't actually know for what purpose I

was required until the next week, when his car came for me and I was driven to Baldock.

"He asked me if I had brought the bleaching and dyeing material with me, and when I told him that I had, he let me into the secret. He said he was very fussy about the colour of horses, and he had a wonderful horse with white legs, and that he objected to white legs. He wanted me to dye the legs a beautiful brown.

"Of course, I laughed at first, it was so amusing ; but he was very serious, and then I was introduced to this beautiful horse."

"And you dyed his legs brown?"

She nodded.

"But that was not all. There was another horse whose legs had to be bleached. Poor dear, they will be bleached permanently unless he dyes them again. I know now, but I didn't know then, that it was a horse called Junket. Every few days I had to go to Baldock and renew the dye and the bleach. Mr. Greyman made it a condition with Mr. Fennett that my commission should be kept a secret even from the firm, and, of course, I never spoke about it, not even to you."

"Then when I saw you in the car——"

"I was on my way to Baldock to dye and bleach my two beautiful clients," she laughed. "I know nothing about race-horses, and I hadn't the slightest idea that the horse I had dyed was Yamen. In fact, until Willie Jeans mentioned the word Baldock, I had not connected the stable with the Derby.

"The morning after I left you I had an engagement to go to Baldock to remove the dye. Mr. Greyman had told me that he had changed his mind and that he wanted the horse to have white legs again. And then I determined to speak to him and tell him just how you were situated.

"He told me the truth and he swore me to secrecy. He was reconciled to Lennox and told him all about Yamen. And then

he discovered that Lennox did not believe him and was having the horses watched. He was so angry that, in order to deceive his nephew's watcher, he had the horse's legs dyed and gave the—the tout—a chance of seeing poor Junket, with his bleached legs, break down—as he knew he would. He told me he had backed Yamen to win him a great fortune."

"So you, of all people on Epsom Downs, knew that Yamen would win?"

"Didn't I back him?" asked the dyer of legs.



KATHLEEN WARREN

*Remnant of '22*





## REMNANT OF '22

**T**HIS is a true story ; it ends in a curious place, in a curious way. It ends grimly, but that is not strange, for the story began in the trouble of 1922, and all stories beginning there seem to end grimly, whenever and wherever they may work out.

I was sitting in a big popular restaurant when the man came in ; big and rugged, dark-haired, blue-eyed, wide-mouthed, a real plug-ugly Irish face had this man. He sat at my table, so I could see every movement ; I saw him pull out an Irish newspaper and begin to read it with the pathetic, hungry look of an exile, searching through every column for news of a place or people he had known.

And then the girl came in ; I saw at once the racial similarity between the two, and thought it rather strange that two Irish people should pick the same table to sit at. They recognised each other almost at once, and the man half rose from his chair in amazement and gladness. Then it was all "Michael" and "Maureen" and exclamations befitting the occasion of this meeting between two who had not met for ten years.

"Since the Trouble it is, Maureen ; ten years since I have seen you, and you still the belle of them all," said the man in his deep, soft-toned voice, his big hands gripped over hers. She laughed quickly, thrillingly, her dark, sad blue eyes searching his swarthy face.

"'Tis yourself has not changed, Michael Donovan," she

answered slowly. "I have never been the same since the night that Paddy—that Paddy—died." She drooped her head, staring at the table with intent, wistful eyes. The man winced at her words, but his hands tightened, and he spoke gently to that bowed head.

"Paddy Halloran? Ah, that was the bitter, bad luck, macushla. When I heard av it, I put down me head, and cried like a foolish baby, for you know, he and I were friends always, for all we both loved *you*. Do you remember how we both followed you about, and how I swore, like the black beast I was, to kill Paddy if you loved him the best. Do you remember?"

Maureen was smiling now, looking at him with tenderness; neither took any notice of me, and no one else took any notice of them. But I heard every word of that low-spoken conversation.

The girl was speaking again. "You were gone, the night they killed him? Ah, yes, they were after you too, and chased you out of your own town, the beasts, two days afore. I remember how happy we were but one week before, when Paddy and I told you of our engagement, and everyone was blessing us, and you sat by yourself for a while, black-faced and grim, so that I was feared av you; then up you came, and crushed my tight hand. 'I'll bless you, too, Maureen macushla, and give luck to Paddy, though 'tis the plague I'm wishing would carry him off, 'deed it is.' Then we both laughed, and Paddy came to hear, his dear eyes shining so, and his hair all rumpled up.

"And a week later you were in hiding and two days gone, and Paddy was dead, and Paddy's people had killed Terence Flanagan." She finished, and sat quiet, her eyes filled with a fierce, hot glare of remembrance.

Michael tried to say something, but choked on it several times, his face twisted. Finally he whispered: "Tell me av it,

mavourneen ; for I never heard the truth—only strange, wild rumour ; only, if it hurts ye, then rest.”

But she shook her head and plunged into the passionate, bitter tale. “’Twas the night of the Donnellys’ party ; the daughter Rose—you remember her, don’t you ?—had been promised to young Murphy, and this was the engagement party. Paddy took me, and we stayed late, after two or so, dancing and singing, sich a joy av it we had. But when we were ready to leave old Donnelly took Paddy aside and said : ‘ Do ye think it safe to go, lad ? They are out ivery night the now, looking for more murder.’

“I heard, and clutched hold of Paddy, demanding that he should stay, but he passed it off, laughing at me, and telling Donnelly ’twas all right ; he was safeguarded. Then he winked and patted his pocket, so that I knew he had his gun, and felt less nervous. So we went on our way, me hanging on his dear arm and he smiling down at me, joking.

“As the light from the Donnelly’s windows died behind us into a little blur, and I saw the long blackness ahead, I felt a chill down my back, for I was afeared for him. “’Tis a long way, me dear, and I know the blackguards are thirsty for blood ; turn back, stay the night at the Donnellys’,’ I begged him, but on we went, all down that dreary road, so cold, and I felt the dark pressing down on us, shutting us off from everyone, and the trees drooped and whined, ragged and tortured in the wind.

“I knew we should come to the cross-roads in a minute, and I felt certain sure something would happen there, where four roads ran across each other, all sombre and wind-chased at night, one road a muck-heap, and another all grit and gravel, where the horses slipped and fell. Jack Carney had been shot there but a month before, and they found him lying in the ditch, half covered with stagnant water, his hair all dragged and woven with weeds, and his poor hands stiff with clay,

as though he had been trying to pull himself up. And his eyes ! Scared ; I went sick just from a look av him ; and his poor mother fell to a twitching, the veins all corded in her neck, till she had a fit.

“All this I was thinking, as our feet slogged through the mud, for the roads were ill-kept then, and my mind was twisted with fear av death and murder, and I threw my arms round Paddy’s neck and prayed him even now to turn back ; the shawl fell back from my arms, and the cold numbed them at once, and the wind caught in my hair, and flung it in strands against Paddy’s face, as I held him tight, tight.

“The cross-roads were but two hundred yards away, and suddenly, as I pleaded with him, I heard another sound above the calling and screaming of the wind. ’Twas the sound av a car-engine running ! Faint it came, throbbing through the wind, and I drew back against Paddy, as we stood still in the middle av the road, with the mud drawing at our feet.

“ ‘Tis them ! ’ I cried, fearful. ‘Always they come in a car, the devils ; run back, Paddy lad, we’ll not face them.’

“Paddy’s face was all grey, and his lips were tightly set ; he put me behind av him, and drew his gun. ‘I’ll not run ; someone has betrayed me, and I’ll find who ’tis, by Mary Mother,’ he snarled.

“Then he set off, almost running, till he was about twenty yards from the cross-roads, when he stood still and shouted : ‘Come out, ye blackguards ! Come out, and murder me if you can ! Come out, you Judas, and God rest your soul, for I’ll put a bullet through your filthy body ! ’

“I screamed to him to stop, for I was half demented, and ran after him, stumbling in the ruts, scarcely seeing for the hair blowing in my eyes ; but I saw them ! Mercy av God ! They just came silently, and were standing there beneath the great old tree, three av them, cloaked by their hats and turned-up collars ; I fell against Paddy, and tried to shield him, but he

flung me away with all his strength, so that I fell in the mud.

"One av them fired ; I saw the flame, and Paddy keel this way and that, till his knees collapsed under him, and he fell on his face in the road. Before I was up, they had fired three times more, and Paddy was writhing faintly ; then it was I saw the other, sneaking away from the car lights into the shadow.

"I knew it was the traitor, and so did Paddy ; as that fourth man raised one arm to beckon the others away, he lifted himself on one arm, and aimed his gun, waveringly. He fired, and the Judas dropped his arm, clutching at his hand, with a howl av pain ; the others closed round him, and dragged him away, while I ran to my man.

"As I knelt to him, lifting his head to my breast, I heard the car roar and rush by. Then I was left alone, with Paddy dying in my arms and his blood drenching my clothes ; he stirred once, and muttered. ' Through the hand ? Tell me father and the boys ; through the hand I got him,' and then more thickly : ' Macushla, kiss me.'

"I kissed him, and felt his body sink down, and a thin little sigh fluttered between our lips ; I sat there for above an hour, rocking him in my arms, cold as I was, until Mike Leary came by in his cart, rather drunk, but sober enough to lift Paddy into the cart, and help me up after him. So we drove through the fierce cold night, Leary rocking on his seat and slashing at his horse, and me sitting among the potato sacks and still holding Paddy's bloody body.

"We reached home a half-hour later, and Leary got down at Paddy's door, and began to batter on it, though I begged him to be quiet for the poor mother's sake ; but they came quickly, and flung wide the house, Jerry Halloran standing bare-necked there, and demanding what was the matter. "Tis Paddy ; the black beasts have shot him,' gasps that fool

man, Leary. A groan like the sound of death came from them in the doorway, and the men-folk came rushing out to the cart, and scrambled up beside me ; Jerry stopped to lift me down, and murmur sympathy, but Sean and the father thought only of the poor body lying all broken among the dusty sacks.

"Tenderly they raised him and bore him from the cart, handling him as though he was but a new-born babe, and murmuring. I stood stiff-limbed with holding my poor sweet so long, dumb with pain, till I heard a tiny whimper from the door : 'twas his mother, poor crushed soul, in her night-dress, with the wind tearing round her, leaning against the wall, hands clasping her head, and eyes set to the sight of the body. I went to her at once, but my comforting was of no use ; she was stricken, and remained so. Only, as they carried Paddy past her, she put one hand to his hair, with a strange dazed look, and muttered. 'Untidy hair ; always untidy, Paddy asthore.'

"I could not listen to his wakes ; the moaning of the women's voices tore my heart, and I rushed from the house, covering my ears to the sound, and trying to cover my soul to the sight of the black covered thing with the candles flaring round it.

"There I stayed in my room, and struggled with my pain ; it was not *them* I cursed in the midst of my crying, but the beast who had betrayed him. But Paddy had marked him, and the brothers would find that marked man, and I would spit in his face before they shot him.

"And they found him next day, a wet day, when the town was covered with drifting rain and sleet, and few were out of doors. I had been watching all day by the window, my face pressed against the cold, wet-smelling pane, thinking too much, so that by evening I was trembling and racked with grief and madness, always seeing that gun spurt, and Paddy falling in the mud.

"As the evening began to drift in, thick shadows dropping to the street, I became more and more distraught. Ah, 'twas the worst day I have ever lived.

"I heard a man running down the street. It was just after the clock said 'six,' and all was dark, brooding dark ; this man was running unevenly ; his boots slithering on the puddle. He passed my window, panting—that terrible, hoarse panting that means a man is running through terror ; I saw him as a blot in the dark ; and his face was invisible.

"Then came the two others, but they were running smoothly, quietly, breathing regularly ; they caught him up by the street corner, and of a sudden the stream of light from the lamp showed up his face as he huddled back against the wall ; 'twas Flanagan, but his face was sharpened by terror, and his eyes bright with it. He seemed to be pleading, but they, they took hold of him, one to each arm, and took him away ; there was a gun driven into his ribs, so that for fear he went, but I saw that his legs were all slack and trembling under him, like a little old man's, so that they were almost carrying him. A little old man, all shrunken and fear-ridden, and he had been a tall, gay-laughing lad !

"Flanagan ! And I had thought he loved Paddy. I tried to say to meself, ' 'Tis Paddy's murderer ; a dirty traitor, who is going to suffer for it,' but I could only remember how he and Paddy used to play together, and how once he kissed me on market day, and laughed when I smacked his face. And now he had been hunted down, padding feet and hoarse breathing, and was going to die in the rain, all crumpled with fear. Ah, mercy of God ! They were the bad, cruel days !

"Jerry told me all about that execution afterwards ; how they took him to where Paddy had died, and there shot him, and threw his body into the ditch. He had told them that his hand had been torn on a nail, but they troubled not to look at the wound.

"Jerry would sit, gripping his hands together, staring in front of him. He dropped to his knees in the road and begged us not to kill him, blubbering, and saying he was innocent. Father pushed him away, and he clung to my legs till Sean hit him in the mouth and knocked him to the ground. Then he was quiet ; only praying softly, while his eyes moved from one to the other of us. When we fired he screamed once and caught at his heart ; then he toppled on to his face, and the blood ran from his mouth into the puddles as he lay quivering. Sean fired again into his brain, and then he and father dragged him to the ditch and pushed him in ; he seemed to clutch at the clay as he went over, and his eyes and mouth were wide open. I was sick.

"That was what happened ; nothing was said of it because of the times and because no one knew the full truth of it, but his mother cursed the whole family up and down the town, poor soul.

"And I, I could not stand Ireland after that, with the black misery on it, tearing and fighting within itself. Father died soon after, and I came to England to stay with my Auntie May. I got a job, and have stayed here ever since. I've no wish to go back, with everything different and Paddy dead. So here I am."

The man still held her hands ; he pressed them gently as he said : "Poor Paddy ! Poor little Maureen, in all that blood and death. If I could have been with you when it happened ; but I had to skip too."

The girl was not listening ; she was looking at his right hand, the hand whose palm lay slightly turned towards her. Her eyes were incredulous, dazed.

The man saw that look, and his own eyes dropped quickly to the table. As that queer, livid colour overspread his face, and he drew his hands back, the girl spoke in a low, dull voice, as though all the world had fallen : "What is that scar on your hand, Michael ?"



GEORGE R. PREEDY

*An Anecdote*



## AN ANECDOTE

**M**ONSEIGNEUR the Maréchal de Villars rode into the town of Lodève, after riding through devastated Languedoc, in a contemplative mood. Although this was his own country it was as strange to him as if it had been the centre of the newly-discovered Indies ; he had been sent to quell the revolt of the Camisards, those French Protestants who, for six years, had defied the authority of His Most Christian Majesty.

It was, of course, a very extraordinary thing that it was necessary for a Maréchal de France, one who had contended on equal terms with the greatest generals of the age, who had served with glory for ten years in Flanders and was one of the most consummate politicians and courtiers at the Court of Versailles, to be sent to quell the rebellion of a handful of heretics and peasants.

There were those who were surprised that Louis Hector, Duc de Villars, had accepted such a task—even to please the aged and querulous King, who regarded him with close affection, even in the face of the rewards and flatteries that same affection promised in the case of success ; but M. de Villars was one of the most amiable, as well as one of the most able of men, and, remarking—“Another ribbon with a jewel at the end will incommode nobody,” he had taken his three thousand dragoons and, after tedious and slow marching, established his headquarters at Lodève, in the midst of that gloomy range of desolate mountains, the Cevennes, where the desperate and frantic Protestants made that last stand which disturbed with

a civil war a kingdom that had too many other wars to confront.

M. de Villars (his fine countenance thoughtful) had ridden through these, to him, unknown regions, so wild, sombre and remote from what he called civilisation ; he had passed burned villages, ruined churches, razed granges, and smouldering farms, and turning in his saddle, had made his ironic comment "that but for the hills it might have been Flanders so complete was the devastation."

His predecessors in authority had not been merciful—torturing and burning, the rack, the wheel, and the gibbet had been for six years tried as a means to bring the Camisards to reason ; most of the inhabitants of Languedoc were in the galleys, in prisons, in exile, but there still was the obstinate remnant, led by a certain Captain Cavalier, who had shown himself a bold and resolute leader with the power of inspiring confidence in his men.

Perhaps not more than six thousand of these fanatics, ensconced in the woods and caves of the gloomy mountains where the Rhone divides le Bas Languedoc from the Province of Dauphiné ; mystical, desperate heretics who had witnessed and survived the atrocities committed by Du Chaila, Arch-priest of the Cevennes, ferocious, exalted avengers of innocent blood who had helped to drag Du Chaila out of his house and murder him one howling winter night, obstinate rebels who were resolved at no cost to submit to Roman Catholic government ; a Maréchal de France was to subdue this handful of untrained heretics, of rude peasants.

"Who is this Cavalier ?" asked M. de Villars indifferently.

No one knew ; some said he was a baker's boy, some a farmer's lout ; in that devastated and desolate country there was no one to give him exact news of Captain Cavalier . . . the few wretched people left on the ruined land fled at the approach of the spreading armies.

De Villars' instructions at Versailles had been precise enough : "Get Cavalier, and the revolt is quelled." And the Maréchal had wagered a thousand *louis d'or* that he would get Cavalier and quell the revolt and be back at Versailles in three months . . . and that, *mon Dieu*, was too long an exile. . . .

Established at Lodève he disclosed his plans to no one, but he stopped the persecutions instantly ; there were no more arrests, the hangman rested, gibbet and wheel waited in vain for fresh prey ; after a week or so of this indulgence, the tormented people who survived began slowly to creep again about the ruins of their devastated homes.

M. de Villars, amiable and composed in Lodève, waited and watched, accepting boredom with good breeding, and took the opportunity of adding a few chapters to his "Mémoires" on the arts of war. It was a hot August day of sultry, brazen heat when a man requested permission to see the Maréchal de Villars ; this stranger was at once admitted to the soldier's presence ; this stranger, who had said he was a native of the Cevennes (his accent proved this at least to be true) and that he was a Roman Catholic gentleman, bearing the name of La Fleurette.

The Maréchal de Villars received him in the sombre, ill-lit parlour with a serene courtesy that should have put him at his ease, but he appeared rather overwhelmed by the presence of the Maréchal, who was one of the handsomest, most extravagant and charming of men at the Court of Versailles, then in the prime of his years and the height of his glory, and adorned in all the bravery of the most sumptuous Court in Europe, laced uniform, orders, tassels—as carefully arrayed as if he was in Flanders, in the company of ruling Princes.

La Fleurette, on the contrary, wore a coffee-coloured suit of a provincial cut, a plain neck-cloth, carelessly dressed hair, and a hat without buckles or plumes ; his lean face was dark and earnest, and he had powerful, nervous hands.

"Monseigneur," he began defiantly, overriding his own embarrassment, "I am a Roman Catholic—I have suffered at the hands of these Camisards, these rebels, for every one severity which has been visited on them by the Government they have retorted with two, or even three atrocities, they are robbers, murderers, ravishers, and they are kept together by this man who calls himself Captain Cavalier."

"So much I knew," agreed the Maréchal pleasantly.

"It's extraordinary," exclaimed La Fleurette, walking up and down uneasily, "that a Maréchal and peer of France should be sent against such a horde of ruffians, and"—he paused, significantly, and added with a certain ferocity—"do you believe, Monseigneur le Maréchal, that you will succeed in capturing this Captain Cavalier, or in coming to terms with him?"

"Monsieur," replied M. de Villars, "both my training and experience have taught me to believe nothing. Do you know anything of this Captain Cavalier?" he added indifferently.

"I know a great deal. I have wormed myself into his confidence. He believes me one of his supporters now, and I have come here to betray him into your hands."

"For what reason and for what reward?" asked M. de Villars, who had heard this manner of offer a great many times in the course of his numerous campaigns.

"The man is ruining the country. But for him the others would submit: the terms he asks are impossible, His Majesty would never grant them. Why, the bold ruffian dares to demand the release of all the Protestants from the prisons and galleys, and the guarantee of liberty of religion in the Cevennes!" La Fleurette laughed fervently and harshly, his quick eyes averted.

To this outburst M. de Villars replied, with a pleasant smile: "Is this Cavalier a gentleman?"

La Fleurette appeared startled, he was taken aback, and hesitated, and then said : "No, he is a peasant."

"But, I think, a noble and generous one?" added the Maréchal indulgently. "Tell me how you propose to deliver him into my hands."

"A woman baits the trap," answered La Fleurette sombrely. "He will come to-morrow night to the Château of Castelnau, which is outside the town—you may have seen it, Monseigneur. The lady is a Roman Catholic and a Loyalist; but she has, at length, by agreement with me, consented to receive this rebel-lover of hers who has so long solicited her in vain. Captain Cavalier will be alone with the lady and her servants, all Loyalists, in the château to-morrow night. If you come with a few of your guards you can surprise him."

M. de Villars smiled, he flicked a speck of dust from his brocaded cuff and remarked, quietly, "I shall be there."

"I should advise you to come yourself," added La Fleurette, "and not to bring too many soldiers, for that will attract suspicion; nor is there any need for a considerable force, Cavalier will be undefended."

"I shall come myself," replied the Maréchal, who seemed amused at the other's rustic simplicity.

"Certainly," added La Fleurette, and this time, violently : "If you do not, I and some others who are in this will think that you are afraid. . . . Cavalier is a man . . . he is never afraid . . . we should like to know that you are his equal."

"I will certainly come myself," replied M. de Villars, and, after a moment's pause and reflection, M. La Fleurette was ushered out with a certain ceremony.

The Maréchal had the curiosity to go to the tall, narrow window and watch his strange visitor cross the courtyards, pass the sentries and the groups of lounging soldiers, mount a shaggy-looking horse and ride through the quiet, hot streets of Lodève. M. de Villars reflected : "I have three thousand

dragoons quartered here, and he knew it—brave, no doubt, as he said himself.”

It was a night of suffocating heat and purple thunder-clouds riding against the moon, which hung above the gloomy mountains of the Cevennes as M. de Villars rode up to the Château of Castelnau ; he halted a while outside the gates of the garden ; all was quiet, all looked, even by the moonlight, as every residence in the Cevennes looked, ruined and deserted ; beyond the gardens were dense woods.

M. de Villars was admitted instantly, at his first light knock on the door, and one ragged, abased creature led his horse away, while another conducted the soldier to a decayed and dismal room with tarnished furniture, lit only by the coarse rays from a broken lamp ; La Fleurette was seated at the rough table with a pile of papers under his hand.

“Good evening, Monseigneur,” he said, rising ; his weather-beaten face was pallid, his lips strained and his eyes bloodshot. “How many soldiers have you brought ?”

“None,” replied the Maréchal serenely, seating himself immediately by right of his rank.

“None ? But have you not come here to capture Captain Cavalier ?”

“I believe,” replied the Maréchal, “that Captain Cavalier and I can come to terms without the aid of a troop of horse.”

La Fleurette stared at him with savage incredulity. He snatched up the lamp and held it closer, while he scanned the calm and handsome features of M. de Maréchal de Villars, who endured this scrutiny with the most amiable of glances and smiling serenity.

“You have come here alone !” gasped La Fleurette, “two miles outside the town, in this lonely part, without even a couple of guards ?”

“You may see for yourself,” answered de Villars negli-



gently ; “you are, I perceive, of the type that only personal evidence will satisfy.”

La Fleurette set down the lamp. “I could scarcely credit,” he muttered, “that any man, even a fine gentleman, could be such a fool. If I told you that five hundred of the most resolved Camisards were in the woods round this house, and in an inner chamber were their most trusted leaders—Captain Cavalier’s officers, Ravenal, Conderc, Rustalet—that you have walked straightly, deliberately, into a trap—a simple, banal sort of a trap. . . . By heaven !” he added, in an excess of excitement. “I had not believed in a deed so easy !”

M. de Villars did not reply ; baffled by his look of amusement La Fleurette hastily left the room, locking the door behind him.

A quick scrutiny, a swift enquiry, showed him that the Maréchal had spoken the truth—he had brought no soldiers, not even a valet with him. La Fleurette, therefore, returned eagerly to his sumptuous prisoner, who had neither changed his attitude nor his expression, but sat pensive, as if slightly bored, at the mean table which held the lantern and the papers.

“Are you satisfied, M. La Fleurette, that I am alone ?”

“I am satisfied,” replied La Fleurette roughly. “Sign, in the name of the King of France, these Camisard terms, for which they have been fighting for six years !” He struck his hand violently on the pile of papers. “Here they are, carefully drafted—our demands——”

The Maréchal, whose splendour was strangely out of place in the sordid room, and whose serenity contrasted strangely with the violence of the other, replied coolly :

“My dear Captain Cavalier, I shall obviously sign nothing.”

“You know me, then ?” cried he who had called himself “La Fleurette.”

"I know you, Captain Cavalier."

"Well, then, since you know me," said the Camisard leader sternly, "I may tell you, M. de Villars, who are so great a soldier, so brilliant a politician, that you have walked into a very simple trap—there is no lady in this château, it is the meeting place of the leaders of what you term 'the rebellion.' We planned this desperate scheme to get hold of you : we thought we could dispose of your troops of horse and hold you prisoner until you signed our terms, but I never hoped it would be as easy as this."

"It is not so easy," replied M. de Villars, "though not, I hope, too difficult. Of course, I shall not sign."

"You are in my power," replied Captain Cavalier harshly.

"Precisely for that reason I shall not sign. And you, my dear Cavalier, will not endeavour to force me. On the contrary, you will permit me to ride *back* to Lodève, exactly as"—he rose as he spoke—"I permitted *you* to ride *out* of Lodève yesterday."

"But you did not know who I was," protested Captain Cavalier.

M. de Villars turned away his face with a look of amusement.

"I brought your description with me to Languedoc, my dear Captain Cavalier ; your movements, too, have been watched ; the Government has its spies. I knew you yesterday, and I guessed your trap . . . not so difficult ; I am now in your power, precisely as you were in mine yesterday ; then, by simply lifting my finger, I could have sent you to the rack or the wheel ; now, by lifting a finger you can send me to something equally unpleasant. But, of course," added the Maréchal, carelessly, "it would be impossible for you to do so."

"Why ?" demanded Captain Cavalier, roughly and fiercely, "I am not a fine courtier, I am not a peer of France, I am not even a gentleman."

"But I," M. de Villars gently reminded him, "treated you as one, Captain Cavalier."

They looked steadily at each other in the uncertain light, and the glance of M. de Villars bore down that of Captain Cavalier.

"It's I who have been the fool," muttered the rebel, sullenly and uneasily.

"Not at all," said the Maréchal amiably, "merely a little impetuous."

"Why did you come here?" questioned Captain Cavalier, baffled and humiliated, "why put yourself in my power?"

"That we might come to a direct and personal understanding. It is possible in no other way," replied the Maréchal. "I have always liked to meet my opponents face to face. It is my office to quell this rebellion, yours to maintain it. I have never failed in any task yet that has been set me, and this is by no means the most difficult of my tasks."

"A threat?" demanded Captain Cavalier, "and from a man in my power?"

The Maréchal smiled: "From the man who had you in *his* power yesterday."

Frowning, uneasy, troubled, Cavalier pointed with a gaunt finger to the papers he had prepared. "Sign those," he said, "and the war is over. I meant that you should sign them, with one pistol at your head and another at your ribs."

"But, by now, you will have perceived, my dear Captain Cavalier," replied the Maréchal with his gracious smile, "that that was rather a crude error of judgment—slightly . . . provincial! You will perceive also that it would have been perfectly useless. No force or menace would induce me to sign what I did not wish to sign."

"What is to prevent me," muttered Captain Cavalier, "from giving the signal to have you delivered to those who would have no scruples or nice feelings in dealing with you—

those who would tear you limb from limb, as the representative of the King and the Pope?"

"There is nothing to prevent you," declared the Maréchal delicately, "but it would be without precedent for one General so to treat another."

"I am no general," replied Cavalier sullenly and uneasily, "I am a mere peasant of Languedoc, and proud to take command of her inhabitants. . . ."

"You are a soldier," returned M. de Villars, "and, I believe, a noble and generous one. I have heard it said in Versailles that Cavalier has behaved like a gentleman, though a heretic——"

"You heard that at Versailles?" asked the rebel, looking up across the thick, hot shadows of the narrow room.

"I have heard at Versailles, and elsewhere, nothing but honour of you, Cavalier; I should like to see you on my staff, when next year I open the campaign in Flanders."

"Why did you come here?" muttered the rebel, baffled and overwhelmed before the serene glance, the pleasant voice, the commanding presence.

"To make your better acquaintance, my dear Cavalier," replied the Maréchal suavely, "that object being achieved, it is useless to prolong the interview to the point of tedium."

With no more than this, M. de Villars rose and left the room with as much ease and leisure as if he had been sauntering from one gallery of Versailles to another, drawing on his gloves and adjusting his fringed sash after his usual manner.

Captain Cavalier did not attempt to impede his enemy's departure; he fell back naturally before him and followed him down the dusty, dark stairs out into the hot moonlit courtyard, where he whistled, and sullenly ordered the ragged groom to bring the Maréchal's horse, which came pacing delicately through the desolation.

The Camisard leaders within the house and the Camisard

soldiers hidden without the house waited tensely for their chief's signal ; it was not given.

When the Maréchal found the long white road to Lodève clear before him, and Cavalier, who had escorted him a short distance on foot, was sullenly leaving him, he turned in his saddle :

"Captain Cavalier, here is the counterpart of those papers you wished me to sign—the terms, I believe, are the same." He took from his breast a sealed packet and held it out.

"Signed?" cried Captain Cavalier, halting, "already signed?"

"Signed before I left Versailles," replied M. de Villars, "my instructions were to grant you the terms if I found you worthy of them—if I could trust you to keep them."

The rebel leader grasped the package stupidly : "Signed before you left Versailles ? And you never told me yesterday, or now when I might have had you killed for refusing to sign—I don't understand . . . why you played this part. . . ."

"Endeavour to do so," smiled the Maréchal, "it is well worth while. Good night, Captain Cavalier !"

When the rebellion was over and peace was restored to the devastated province of Languedoc, when the Maréchal de Villars had returned to Versailles, and had collected his thousand *louis d'or*, when Captain Cavalier had a pair of colours in His Majesty's Musketeers, someone had the curiosity to ask M. de Villars how he had contrived, after so many had failed, to subdue the obstinate and ferocious peasant and turn him into a loyal soldier of His Majesty ?

"By treating him as a gentleman," said the Maréchal de Villars negligently.



ERIC WALROND

*Inciting to Riot*





## INCITING TO RIOT

NEITHER the mestizo lad, face clouded beneath a palm leaf hat, nor the one-eyed Basque grocer, Juan Poveda, turned a hair. The boy was engrossed in a dazzling new toy. He was juggling with a bolero—spinning in the air the leashed, vari-hued ball, tunnelled half-way to the core, and then trying to settle the revolving spherical shape upon the polished end of a wooden stump. More often than not he failed.

Son of a Culebra peon and eight years old, the boy had trailed in behind the two negresses. He was the first served. The act was characteristic of a mental bias which the grocer possessed regarding the merits and “rights of priority” of non-Latin blacks and mestizos, respectively. For the boy was a Panameno—already he seemed to possess all the exuberant self-esteem of the Panama mongrel which so warmed the cockles of Juan Poveda’s heart—while the women were only *chombos*—“savages” from the British West Indies.

The distinction in itself was sufficiently explicit. It was, more directly, the result of Juan Poveda’s persistent effort to even up the score. It was due to his blind, ungovernable way of showing that he had not ceased, though the occasion was fast dimming, to brood over the loss of his eye.

“Five cents’ worth of salted cod,” cried the boy.

“Like a body ain’t got nutton else fo’ do but stan’ yah,” cried Miss Fashion.

She was large, black and barefooted. Gold and silver bangles jingled on her plump chocolate-coloured arms. Her

headkerchief of red, green and yellow was like a clump of gaudy autumn crotons. She wore a peony-coloured shawl and a white calico skirt, gathered up from just beneath the hips by a girdle of banana shags.

"My Joey," cried Mrs. Piggott, "will be home tereckly the whistle blow fo' knock-off."

A small wizened creature with a squeaky voice and a mottled nutmeg hue, Mrs. Piggott, like Miss Fashion, shared with an ebony *comado* a one-room flat in a box car lying on a shunting in the Culebra foothills. She was newly shod and wore a deep-crowned straw hat. Her dress of spotless white drill was stiffly starched.

"Shut up!" snarled Poveda, glaring.

Delving in a crate beneath the counter, the grocer extracted the codfish, spread it across the redwood slab and cut off a thick slice. He weighed and wrapped it up and shoved the parcel before the boy.

"Dime of spuds!"

Fastening the bolero in his belt the boy seized up the parcel and began unfolding it. "Then when he carry it home to he murrer," murmured Miss Fashion, "he'll swear to Gawd the dog snatch it out o' he hand."

"Lil' forced-ripe brat!"

Poveda weighed out two pounds of Irish potatoes and poured them in a sack which the boy extended to him.

"Hurry up an' give me a chopine o' blackeyed peas," cried Miss Fashion, "me is next."

"Yo' don't got no black puddin' an' souse, me?" cried a squeaky voice.

The boy paid the bill and strolled out.

Sweeping the coins in the cash drawer, Poveda proceeded to measure out two pints of the speckled grain.

"Pound o' corn' pork," added Miss Fashion.

Mrs. Piggott's inquiries might be ignored, but she was

not going to be silenced by the grocer's predilection to curry favour. "The las' souse I got heah," she said, "was so hard it musta come from the sow gran'-murrer. Hard no rock stone. The bone was so hard, chile, an' de seasonin' taste so wishy washy, an' de cucumber water wuz so sour, ah must needs tell yo', Mistah Poveda, dat it berry nearly aggle me stomach."

With a preoccupied air Juan Poveda fetched up from the pork barrel a slab of meat and laid it before Miss Fashion.

"That's too fat," cried that elegant lady, turning up her lips, "don't give me that, man. Ain't you got no lean?"

Poveda held the leg high up before her gaze. The fast encrusting brine twinkled on it like silver. "Yo' don't like fat," cried Poveda in astonishment, "but every people like fat."

"No," sulked Miss Fashion, "yo' bes' lemme have de salt beef. When de pork fat so, it stan' 'pon me stomach an' giv' me de krolick."

Poveda slipped the leg of corned pork back into the cask of brine.

"An' tree cents' worth o' yucca."

"Yo' tek," cried Poveda, wrapping up the corned beef, "when yo' go out." He nodded toward a medley of fruits and vegetables lying beside the door.

"How much is the yucca?" asked Miss Fashion, counting out her coppers.

"Two fo' tree cents."

"Lahd, yo' dear wid yo' tings though, eh?"

Packing her purchases carefully in her basket, she turned and moved away from the counter.

"Come now, Mistah Poveda," cried Mrs. Piggott, "lemme get out o' yah. My Joey gwine soon come home now. Gimme a gill o' ripe plantains."

There was a big bunch of plantains hanging overhead. Poveda reached up and twisted off two ripe, deeply-dyed ones. As he started to wrap them up, he turned and glimpsed Miss Fashion lifting from the vegetable heap something which she had neither asked nor paid for.

"*Tramposa !*" cried Poveda, running from behind the counter.

Mrs. Piggott turned and observed, scandalised : "Hey, look 'pon she though, teefin' the man red pepper."

"'Clare to Heaven," vowed Miss Fashion, lamely, "a body can't even tek up a pepper fo' look 'pon it beout all yo' tink me gwine teef it."

Poveda's swarthy face turned purple with fulsome rage.

"To look 'pon dis yah man," continued Miss Fashion, "yo' would a tink me gwine run 'way wid him dutty old red pepper. The man go on so like me nebber see a lil' red pepper in me life befo'." With an affected air of injured pride and exalted self-righteousness, Miss Fashion scornfully tossed the incriminating object back upon the vegetable heap and, throwing up her chin, strutted out.

"*Tramposa !*" cried Poveda, gazing after her.

"Some people can teef an' got so much mout' besides," ruminated Mrs Piggott.

Bending down over the pyramid of yams, eddoes and cassavas, Poveda shuffled the basket containing the peppers, thyme, okras and watercress ; tore a russet leaf off a cluster of sapodillas, then, gorgwling savagely, returned to the counter. He was entirely unprepared for the tirade which greeted him :

"Look yah, Mistah Poveda, wha' dis yo' giv' me ? Me ax yo' fo' ripe plantains, yes, but yo' don't oblige fo' giv' me nutton as sawf as dis. Ain't yo' got no harder ones ? Pick them from up top yonder," she cried, pointing to a cluster of green ones nearer the stem. "Why, man, these is sawf as

pap." She sank her fingers in them to convince him of their softness.

Poveda stood petrified. Suddenly he seized the plantains and flung them upon the vegetable heap. "Go!" he spluttered in a violent rage, "*Allez . . . allez . . . zut!* You savvy?" he leered at her angrily, his one bluish grey eye aflame. "You shameless *chombos*, you *sacré negras jamaicanas*, me no like you! Go to the Chinaman next door—he please you! Don't come again my store."

Alarmed at the grocer's sudden explosive manner, the negress turned and swiftly walked out the door.

## II

If Pelota y Gracios had not been a *contre-maitre* in Egypt, Juan Poveda would never have had the pluck to leave Oracq and a job in a blacksmith's shop to join the French in Panama. A chubby weasel of a man with rosy cheeks, a walrus moustache and mocking blue eyes, Pelota y Gracios was the richest peasant in Oracq. He was held on a pedestal by the peasants in the small Pyrenees village as a model deserving of emulation.

The path which Pelota y Gracios had trodden to fame and fortune lay paved with the bottomless mud and silting sands of the Nile delta. As an overseer at Lake Timsah during the excavating of the Suez Canal, Pelota y Gracios had had supervision of a gang of Arab *fellahs*. He early got on to the ways of overseers and was not slow in mastering the art of padding the pay-roll. When, after an absence of five years, Pelota y Gracios returned to Oracq he was wealthy enough to buy up half the farming properties in the valley, and the big seignorial mansion on the ramparts.

One day Pelota y Gracios met Juan Poveda in the street and quietly said to him:

"Juan, my boy, take my advice and go to Panama."

"Panama?" cried the blacksmith's apprentice.

"Yes, Panama," declared the crafty *contre-maitre*. Then drawing Juan by the lapel of his blue velvet jacket, Pelota y Gracios added: "The same syndicate I worked for in Egypt is now in Panama, cutting a canal there. This is the chance of a lifetime, Juan. It's idiotic to be frittering away your life in a place like Oracq earning wages no Arab *fellah* would spit on, in a blacksmith's shop. Get out and try your luck in Panama."

"Panama!" cried Juan Poveda, dreamily, "Panama. . . ."

Dusk deepened into night.

With a splash the propellers started vibrating and the steamer again got under way. The lights of Cartagena, growing steadily dimmer, flickered along the invisible shore.

Lying in a hammock on the poop deck, Juan Poveda experienced a twinge of joy. Only one more night at sea and then Colon, gateway to the Promised Land! It was a far cry now from Oracq, slumbering at the feet of a Pyrenees altitude.

He was riding on the voluptuous bosom of the Sea of Darkness! He was nearing, at last, the *chantiers* of Panama!

Landing at Colon, Juan Poveda was given the rank of *contre-maitre* and sent with a batch of Jamaica negroes and Chinese coolies to a settlement on the Cruces River. Tons of cement and a quantity of high-powered machinery were to be brought in, the jungle cleared and a reservoir built. It was all part of a vast engineering project to harness the Chagres and its numerous tributaries.

One day in a dispute with one of the negroes a scuffle ensued and the big muscular *contre-maitre* was seized by the back of the neck and butted into unconsciousness. One eye shut up instantly, never to open again. Juan Poveda was taken to the clinic on Buccaneer Hill and the eye was removed.

He wore a piece of crêpe, like a blinker, over the hollow and from then onward hated the very sight of a West Indian negro.

He gave up the Cruces job and settled down in San Felipe, a pueblo outside Panama City, as a vendor of celery, white cheese and strips of meat dried in the sun. Still a good Oracq peasant as regards frugality—still a disciple of Pelota y Gracios—Juan Poveda, at the end of two years, was ready to join the mad rush to Culebra, the centre of the canal excavations, and set up as a retail grocer.

## III

A negro labourer entered the shop.

"Poveda," he said, "gimme a pound o' corn meal."

The grocer scooped up a ladle of the bright yellow dust, poured it out upon a sheet of brown paper and wrapped it up.

"A dime o' okras," cried the man.

"Take," gestured Poveda, "yonder—when you go out."

"God any lard oil?"

"Yes, how much you want?"

Producing an empty olive oil bottle, the negro answered: "Oh, fill it half full."

"Anything else?" asked Poveda.

"Tree cents' worth o' fat pork."

Poveda's forearm sank in the adjacent cask of brine. He drew up a leg of pork and spread it upon the redwood slab. He sliced off a large portion, stuck it upon a piece of paper and placed it in the scales. Just then the negro intervened.

"Wait there, Mistah Poveda," he said, "lemme see dat piece o' meat yo' got there."

Poveda tossed it over at him: whereupon the negro examined it as might a veterinary surgeon the tick-infested flank of a pedigree cow.

"Why, man, this pork is nothin' but fat," drawled the

labourer, "it ain't got a bit o' lean. Ain't you got no mo' lean? Go look in the barrel yonder an' see if yo' can't find a piece with a little bit mo' lean 'pon it fo' me."

With a snarl and a burst of rage, Poveda leaped upon the counter and kicked the negro full in the chest. Reeling across the room, the negro fell at the foot of the pyramid of fruits and vegetables, lying in a half-dazed condition.

"You *sacré negros jamaicanos!*" cried Poveda, striding with a machete toward the fallen man. "Don't any o' you cross my doorway again! Stay out! *Chombos negros!*"

Slowly the labourer rose to his feet. Red as a beet and puffing furiously, Poveda stood above him with the machete twirled high in the air.

"Is fight yo' want, fight?" cried the negro. "Tell me, is fight yo' want, fight?"

"Aw, what you want?" growled Juan Poveda, uncertainly.

"Knock me, no," teased the negro, advancing to meet the machete. "See me here—why don't yo' knock me?"

Poveda wavered. He was seized by a strange indecision. Somehow the negro's unexpected bravado disarmed him.

The tension slackened and the labourer stepped out calmly from beneath the menacing machete. "Wait!" he cried, shaking a finger under Juan Poveda's nose, "you wait till I come back and see if yo' ain't gwine have to buss open my head wit' yo' machete."

He turned and slowly walked out the shop.

Plagued by the rising suspicion that the negro in some way had triumphed in the fray, Poveda returned behind the counter in a black, angry mood.

A shrill warning cry—someone shouting his name—roused the grocer. Rushing to the door, Juan Poveda went out upon



the veranda and stood gazing across the ravine. On the edge of the railway embankment stood Coloradillo, a squat Napa-cundi albino, employed as a *vigilante* in the native constabulary.

"The Jamaicans!" cried Coloradillo, breathlessly, "they are coming to attack you! A hundred of them——"

Poveda fled to the dark interior of the shop. He took down from a shelf a long carbine and rammed it full of shells. In case of attack he had certain decisive factors on his side. A person entering the shop by the veranda was like a spot upon a disc, a silhouette against the sky. With a gun at his elbow he would always have the better of the invader.

Someone was crossing the plank lying across the swampy ravine from the edge of the railway embankment to the veranda. An impression of swagger was conveyed by the person's long free strides.

Above the sound of the approaching footsteps Juan Poveda also heard the murmurings of a mob. The blacks were talking; saying how—if and when they caught him—they were going to mince his meat.

Suddenly the doorway darkened.

"See me here now," cried the negro, "why don't yo' knock me now?"

Juan Poveda, crouching beside an oil drum, resolved to take the negro at his word. Quickly bringing the carbine to his shoulder, he fired. The negro fell bleeding profusely.

The shot quickened the mob's advance. Poveda crept deeper in the shop. Another negro, flying to the side of the fallen man, darted within Poveda's range and the carbine again blazed forth.

Poveda flicked out the smoking shell and again cocked the carbine. But no more blacks advanced to satisfy the grocer's avenging passion.

Above the confusion of flaming tongues and the wheeling

movement of the mob, Poveda recognised the voice of the chief of the Culebra *chantier* :

"If you men don't get back to your barracks, I'll set the Federal cavalry on you, too."

Poveda heaved a deep sigh. His ears tingled with the memory of the negroes' threats. He heard them shuffle down the veranda, file across the plank and go up to the railway embankment.

He drew courage and straightened up, and three men, in the blue tunics and cork helmets of the French, entered the shop.

"Come on, Poveda," said one of them, "we can't let you stay here. You incite the labourers to riot. Hurry up—you leave for Panama at once."

A constable with the granulated eyelids of a San Blas albino was delegated by the chief of the *chantier* to escort Juan Poveda into exile.

JOHN COLLIER

*The Right Side*



## THE RIGHT SIDE

A YOUNG man, who was looking extremely pale, walked to the middle of Westminster Bridge and clambered on to the parapet. A swarthy gentleman, some years his senior, in evening dress, with dark red carnation, Inverness cape, monocle, and short imperial, appeared as if from nowhere, and had him by the ankle.

"Let me go, damn you!" muttered the would-be suicide, with a tug and a kick.

"Get down, and walk beside me," said the stranger; "or that policeman, who has already taken a step or two in our direction, will most certainly run you in. Let us pretend to be two friends, of whom one wished for a thrill, while the other was anxious that he should not fall."

The young man who was so eager to be in the Thames had a great aversion to being in prison. Accordingly he fell into step with the stranger, and smiling (for now they were just passing the bobby), "Damn and blast you!" he said. "Why can't you mind your own silly business?"

"But, my dear Philip Westwick," replied the other, "I regard you as very much my business."

"Who may you be?" cried the young man impatiently. "I don't know you. How did you get hold of my name?"

"It came into my mind," said his companion, "just half an hour ago, when first you formed your rash resolution."

"I don't know how that can be," said Philip. "Nor do I care."

"You lovers," said his companion, "are surprised by nothing, except first that your mistresses should fancy you, and next, that they should fancy someone else."

"How do you know," cried our poor Philip, "that it was over that sort of thing?"

"I know that, and much more, equally ridiculous," replied the other.

"What would you say if I reminded you that no less than a month ago, when you considered yourself in heaven, and were, in point of fact, in your Millicent's arms, you discerned something in the essence of ennui in the nape of her neck, and actually wished her transformed into the little brunette who serves in a tea-shop in Bond Street? And now you are on the brink of suicide because your Millicent has left you, though the little brunette is, for all you know, in Bond Street still. What do you say to that?"

"You seem to be unaware," said Philip, "that what one wishes when one is in one girl's arms, and what one wishes when someone else is probably there, are two very different things. Otherwise, I admit your knowledge is devilish uncanny."

"That is only natural," replied the other with a complacent smile, from which Philip immediately realised that he was in the company of none other than the Devil himself.

"What are you up to?" he demanded, drawing back a little.

The Devil, with a look of great benevolence, offered him a cigarette.

"I suppose it's not doped?" inquired Philip, sniffing at it suspiciously.

"Oh come!" said the Devil with a sneer. "Do you think I need resort to such measures as that, to overcome you. I have *reason* on my side."

"You have a reputation of reasoning with some effect," said Philip. "I have very little desire to be eternally damned."

"What did you expect, then," said the Devil, "when you contemplated suicide?"

"I see nothing wrong in that," cried our hero.

"Nor does a puppy that destroys his master's slipper," said the Devil. "However, he is punished for it."

"I can't believe it," said Philip obstinately.

"Come with me, then," said the Devil, and took him to a fun fair in the neighbourhood of the Tottenham Court Road. Here a number of the ugliest wretches on earth were amusing themselves with gambling games : others were peering in stereoscopes which showed scenes of Parisian night life. The rest of them picking pockets, making overtures to certain female habitués of the place, swearing, and indulging in all manner of filthy conversation.

The Devil looked on all these much as one who has been walking among the poppies and the wild cornflowers of the fields looks upon the cultivated plants in the garden about his back-door. The commissioner touched his cap, much as gardeners do : the Devil acknowledged the salute, and, taking out a latchkey, led Philip to a little door in the wall, which, being opened, discovered a lift.

They got in, and descended for several minutes at an incredible speed.

"My dear Devil," said Philip, puffing at his cigarette, which was, in fact, doped, and gave him the impression of being a man of affairs. "My dear Devil, if we go on at this rate we shall soon be in Hell itself."

Nothing could have been more true. The lift stopped, they got out ; they were in a vast hall, which resembled nothing so much as the foyer of some gargantuan theatre or picture palace. There were two or three box-offices, in front of which the prices of admission were displayed : Stalls—gluttony ; Private Boxes—lechery ; Dress Circle—vanity ; Gallery—sloth, and so forth. There was also a bar, at which one or two uniformed

fiends were chatting with the barmaids, among whom our friend was astonished to see the little brunette from Bond Street.

Now and then a door opened on the vast auditorium, and it was apparent that the play or talkie in progress was a lively one.

"There's a dance lounge through here," said the Devil, "to which I particularly wanted to take you."

A door was opened for them : they found themselves in a reasonably large apartment, got up in the grotto style with ferns and imitation rock-work, and a damp and chilly air. A band was playing a travesty of Scarlatti : several people were dancing rather listlessly. Philip observed that many of them were disgustingly fat.

The Devil led him up to a slim and pale girl, murmured a few words : Philip, seeing nothing else to do, bowed, offered her his arm, and they began to circle the room.

She danced very languidly, and kept her heavy lids dropped low over her eyes. Philip uttered one or two trifling remarks. "Do you come here often ?" he said. She smiled faintly, but did not reply.

He was a little piqued at her remaining so listless (besides, he had smoked one of the Devil's cigarettes) : "How very cold your hand is," he said, giving it a slight squeeze.

It certainly was. He manœuvred this unresponsive partner into a corner, where he clutched her waist rather more tightly than was necessary for dancing. He felt a chilly moisture penetrate the sleeve of his jacket, and a faint but unmistakable smell of river-mud became perceptible. He looked at her closely and observed something extremely pearly about her eyes.

"Excuse me," he said.

You may depend he lost no time in rejoining the Devil.

"Now," said that worthy, "are you still unable to believe that those who drown themselves are eternally damned ?"



Philip was forced to admit the point.

"You have no idea how bored that poor girl is," said the Devil compassionately, "and she has been here only thirty years. What is that, in comparison to Eternity?"

"Very little, very little, indeed," said Philip.

"You see what sort of partners she gets," continued the arch-fiend. "During every dance they reveal to her and she to them, some little unpleasantness of the sort that so disquieted you."

"But why should they be in a dance lounge?" asked Philip.

"Why not?" said the Devil with a shrug. "Have another cigarette."

He then proposed that they should adjourn to his office, to talk matters over.

"Now, my dear Westwick," said he, when they were comfortably esconced in arm-chairs, "what shall our little arrangement be? I can, of course, annihilate all that has occurred. In that case you will find yourself back on the parapet, in the very act of jumping; just as you were when I caught you by the ankle. Shortly afterwards you will arrive in the little dance lounge you saw; whether fat or thin depends upon the caprice of the waters."

"It is night," said Philip. "The river flows at four miles an hour. I should probably get out to sea unobserved. Yes, I should almost certainly be one of the fat ones. They appeared to me remarkably deficient in *it* or S.A., if those terms are familiar to you."

"I have heard of them," said the Devil with a smile. "Have a cigar?"

"No, thanks," said Philip. "What alternative do you suggest?"

"Here is our standard contract," said the Devil. "Do have a cigar. You see—unlimited wealth, fifty years, Helen of

Troy—well, that's obsolete. Say, Miss ——," and he mentioned the name of a delightful film star.

"Of course," said Philip, "there's this little clause about possession of my soul. Is that essential?"

"Well, it's the usual thing," said the Devil. "Better let it stand. This is where you sign."

"Well, I don't know," said Philip, "I don't think I'll sign."

"What?" cried the Devil.

Our hero pursed his lips.

"I don't want to influence you, my dear Westwick," said the Devil, "but have you considered the difference between coming in to-morrow as a drowned suicide and coming in—fifty glorious years hence, mind—as a member of the staff? Those were members of the staff you saw talking to the little brunette at the bar. Nice girl!"

"All the same," said Philip, "I don't think I'll sign. Many thanks, though."

"All right," said the Devil. "Back you go, then!"

Philip was aware of a rushing sensation; he seemed to be shooting upwards like a rocket. However, he kept his presence of mind, kept his weight on his heels, and when he got to the parapet jumped down, but on the right side.

DOROTHY L. SAYERS

*Maber-Shalal-Hashbaz*



## MAHER-SHALAL-HASHBAZ

**N**O Londoner can ever resist the attraction of a street crowd. Mr. Montague Egg, driving up Kingsway, and observing a group of people staring into the branches of one of the slender plane trees which embellish that thoroughfare, drew up to see what all the excitement was about.

"Poor puss!" cried the bystanders, snapping encouraging fingers. "Poor pussy, then! Kitty, kitty, kitty, come on!"

"Look, baby, look at the pretty pussy!"

"Fetch her a bit of cat's-meat."

"She'll come down when she's tired of it."

"Chuck a stone at her!"

"Now then, what's all this about?"

The slender, shabby child who stood so forlornly holding the empty basket appealed to the policeman.

"Oh, do please send these people away! How *can* he come down, with everybody shouting at him? He's frightened, poor darling."

From among the swaying branches a pair of amber eyes gleamed wrathfully down. The policeman scratched his head.

"Bit of a job, ain't it, missie? However did he come to get up there?"

"The fastening came undone, and he jumped out of the basket just as we were getting off the bus. Oh, please do something!"

Mr. Montague Egg, casting his eye over the crowd, perceived on its outskirts a window-cleaner with his ladders upon a truck. He hailed him.

"Fetch that ladder along, sonnie, and we'll soon get him down, if you'll allow me to try, miss. If we leave him to himself, he'll probably stick up there for ages. 'It's hard to reassure, persuade or charm the customer who once has felt alarm.' Carefully, now. That's the ticket."

"Oh, thank you so much! Oh, do be gentle with him. He does so hate being handled."

"That's all right, miss; don't you worry. Always the gentleman, that's Monty Egg. Kind about the house and clean with children. Up she goes!"

And Mr. Egg, clapping his smart trilby upon his head and uttering crooning noises, ascended into the leafage. A loud explosion of spitting sounds and a small shower of twigs floated down to the spectators, and presently Mr. Egg followed, rather awkwardly, clutching a reluctant bunch of ginger fur.

The girl held out the basket, the four furiously kicking legs were somehow bundled in, a tradesman's lad produced a piece of string, the lid was secured, the window-cleaner was rewarded and removed his ladder, and the crowd dispersed. Mr. Egg, winding his pocket-handkerchief about a lacerated wrist, picked the scattered leaves out of his collar and straightened his tie.

"Oh, he's scratched you dreadfully!" lamented the girl, her blue eyes large and tragic.

"Not at all," replied Mr. Egg. "Very happy to have been of assistance. I am sure. Can I have the pleasure of driving you anywhere? It'll be pleasanter for him than a bus, and if we pull up the windows he can't jump out, even if he does get the basket open again."

The girl protested, but Mr. Egg firmly hustled her into his little saloon and inquired where she wanted to go.

"It's this address," said the girl, pulling a newspaper cutting out of her worn handbag. "Somewhere in Soho, isn't it?"

Mr. Egg, with some surprise, read the advertisement:

“Wanted : hard-working, capable Cat (either sex), to keep down mice in pleasant villa residence and be companion to middle-aged couple. Ten shillings and good home to suitable applicant.—Apply personally to Mr. John Doe, La Cigald Bienheureuse, Firth Street, W., on Tuesday between 11 and 1 o’clock.”

“That’s a funny set-out,” said Mr. Egg, frowning.

“Oh ! Do you think there’s anything wrong with it ? Is it just a joke ?”

“Well,” said Mr. Egg, “I can’t quite see why anybody wants to pay ten bob for an ordinary cat, can you ? I mean, they usually come gratis and f.o.b. from somebody who doesn’t like drowning kittens. And I don’t quite believe in Mr. John Doc ; he sounds like what they call a legal fiction.”

“Oh, dear !” cried the girl, with tears in the blue eyes “I did so hope it would be all right. You see, we’re so dreadfully hard up, with father out of work, and Maggie—that’s my stepmother—says she won’t keep Maher-shalal-hashbaz any longer, because he scratches the table-legs and eats as much as a Christian, bless him !—though he doesn’t really—only a little milk and a bit of cat’s-meat, and he’s a beautiful mouser, only there aren’t many mice where we live—and I thought, if I could get him a good home—and ten shillings for some new boots for Dad, he needs them so badly——”

“Oh, well, cheer up,” said Mr. Egg. “Perhaps they’re willing to pay for a full-grown, certified mouser. Or—tell you what—it may be one of these cinema stunts. We’ll go and see, anyhow ; only I think you’d better let me come with you and interview Mr. Doc. I’m quite respectable,” he added hastily. “Here’s my card. Montague Egg, travelling representative of Plummet and Rose, wines and spirits, Piccadilly. Interviewing customers is my suit. ‘The salesman’s job is to get the trade—don’t leave the house till the deal is made’—that’s Monty’s motto.”

"My name's Jean Maitland, and Dad's in the commercial line himself—at least, he was till he got bronchitis last winter, and now he isn't strong enough to go on the road."

"Bad luck!" said Monty, sympathetically, as he turned down High Holborn. He liked this child of sixteen or so, and registered a vow that "something should be done about it."

It seemed as though there were often people who thought ten shillings good payment for a cat. The pavement before the grubby little Soho restaurant was thick with cat-owners, some carrying baskets, some clutching their animals in their arms. The air resounded with the mournful cries of the prisoners.

"Some competition," said Monty. "Well, anyhow, the post doesn't seem to be filled yet. Hang on to me, and we'll try what we can do."

They waited for some time. It seemed that the applicants were being passed out through a back entrance, for, though many went in, none returned. Eventually they secured a place in the queue going up a dingy staircase, and, after a further eternity, found themselves facing a dark and discouraging door. Presently this was opened by a stout and puffy-faced man, with very sharp little eyes, who said briskly; "Next, please!" and they walked in.

"Mr. John Doe?" said Monty.

"Yes. Brought your cat? Oh, the young lady's cat. I see. Sit down, please. Name and address, miss?"

The girl gave an address south of the Thames, and the man made a note of it, "in case," he explained, "the chosen candidate should prove unsuitable, and I might want to write to you again. Now, let us see the cat."

The basket was opened and a ginger head emerged resentfully.

"Oh, yes. Fine specimen. Poor pussy, then. He doesn't seem very friendly."

"He's frightened by the journey, but he's a darling when he once knows you, and a splendid mouser. And so clean."



"That's important. Must have him clean. And he must work for his living, you know."

"Oh, he will. He can tackle rats or anything. We call him Maher-shalal-hashbaz, because he 'makes haste to the spoil.' But he answers to Mash, don't you, darling?"

"I see. Well, he seemed to be in good condition. No fleas? No diseases? My wife is very particular."

"Oh, no. He's a splendid healthy cat. Fleas, indeed!"

"No offence, but I must be particular, because we shall make a great pet of him. I don't care much for his colour. Ten shillings is a high price to pay for a ginger one. I don't know whether——"

"Come, come," said Monty. "Nothing was said in your advertisement about colour. This lady has come a long way to bring you the cat, and you can't expect her to take less than she's offered. You'll never get a better cat than this; everyone knows that the ginger ones are the best mousers; they've got more go in them. And look at his handsome white shirt-front. It shows you how beautifully clean he is. And think of the advantage—you can see him—you and your good lady won't go tripping over him in a dark corner, same as you do with these black and tabby ones. As a matter of fact, we ought to charge extra for such a handsome colour as this. They're much rarer and more high-class than the ordinary cat."

"There's something in that," admitted Mr. Doe.

"Well, look here, Miss Maitland. Suppose you bring Maher—what you said—out to our place this evening, and if my wife likes him we will keep him. Here's the address. And you must come at six precisely, please, as we shall be going out later."

Monty looked at the address, which was at the northern extremity of the Edgware-Morden Tube.

"It's a very long way to come on the chance," he said resolutely. "You will have to pay Miss Maitland's expenses."

"Oh, certainly," said Mr. Doe. "That's only fair. Here is half a crown. You can return me the change this evening. Very well, thank you. Your cat will have a really happy home if he comes to us. Put him back in his basket now. The other way out please. Mind the step. *Good morning.*"

Mr. Egg and his new friend, stumbling down an excessively confined and stuffy back staircase into a malodorous by-street, looked at one another.

"He seemed rather an abrupt sort of person," said Miss Maitland. "I do *hope* he'll be kind to Maher-shalal-hashbaz. You were *marvellous* about the gingeriness—I thought he was going to be stuffy about that. My angel Mash! how *anybody* could object to his beautiful colour!"

"Um!" said Mr. Egg. "Well, Mr. Doe may be O.K. but I shall believe in his ten shillings when I see it. And, in any case, you're not going to his house alone. I shall call for you in the car at five o'clock."

"But, Mr. Egg—I can't allow you! Besides, you've taken half a crown off him for my fare."

"That's only business," said Mr. Egg. "Five o'clock sharp I shall be there."

"Well, come at four, and let us give you a cup of tea, anyway. That's the least we can do."

"Pleased, I'm sure," said Mr. Egg.

The house occupied by Mr. John Doe was a new detached villa, standing solitary at the extreme end of a new and unmade suburban road. It was Mrs. Doe who answered the bell—a small, frightened-looking woman with watery eyes and a nervous habit of plucking at her pale lips with her fingers. Maher-shalal-hashbaz was released from his basket in the sitting-room, where Mr. Doe was reclining in an arm-chair, reading the evening paper. The cat sniffed suspiciously at

him, but softened to Mrs. Doe's timid advances so far as to allow his ears to be tickled.

"Well, my dear," said Mr. Doe, "will he do? You don't object to the colour, eh?"

"Oh, no. He's a beautiful cat. I like him very much."

"Right. Then we'll take him. Here you are, Miss Maitland. Ten shillings. Please sign this receipt. Thanks. Never mind about the change from the half-crown. There you are, my dear; you've got your cat, and I hope we shall see no more of those mice. Now"—he glanced at his watch—"I'm afraid you must say good-bye to your pet quickly, Miss Maitland; we've got to get off. He'll be quite safe with us."

Monty strolled out with gentlemanly reticence into the hall while the last words were said. It was, no doubt, the same gentlemanly feeling which led him to move away from the sitting-room door towards the back part of the house; but he had only waited a very few minutes when Jean Maitland came out, sniffing valiantly into a small handkerchief, and followed by Mrs. Doe.

"You're fond of your cat, aren't you, my dear? I do hope you don't feel too——"

"There, there, Flossie," said her husband, appearing suddenly at her shoulders, "Miss Maitland knows he'll be well looked after." He showed them out, and shut the door quickly upon them.

"If you *don't* feel happy about it," said Mr. Egg uneasily, "we'll have him back in two twos."

"No, it's all right," said Jean. "If you don't mind, let's get in at once and drive away—rather fast."

As they lurched over the uneven road, Mr. Egg saw a lad coming down it. In one hand he carried a basket. He was whistling loudly.

"Look!" said Monty. "One of our hated rivals. We've got in ahead of him, anyhow. 'The salesman first upon the

field gets the bargain signed and sealed.' Damn it!" he added to himself, as he pressed down the accelerator, "I hope it's O.K. I wonder."

Although Mr. Egg had worked energetically to get Maher-shalal-hashbaz settled in the world, he was not easy in his mind. The matter preyed upon his spirits to such an extent that, finding himself back in London on the following Saturday week, he made an expedition south of the Thames to make inquiries. And when the Maitlands' door was opened by Jean, there by her side, arching his back and brandishing his tail, was Maher-shalal-hashbaz.

"Yes," said the girl, "he found his way back, the clever darling! Just a week ago to-day—and he was dreadfully thin and draggled—how he did it, I can't think. But we simply couldn't send him away again, could we, Maggie?"

"No," said Mrs. Maitland. "I don't like the cat, and never did, but there! I suppose even cats have their feelings. But it's an awkward thing about the money."

"Yes," said Jean. "You see, when he got back and we decided to keep him, I wrote to Mr. Doe and explained, and sent him a postal order for the ten shillings. And this morning the letter came back from the Post Office, marked 'Not Known.' So we don't know what to do about it."

"I never did believe in Mr. John Doe," said Monty. "If you ask me, Miss Maitland, he was no good, and I shouldn't bother any more about him."

But the girl was not satisfied, and presently the obliging Mr. Egg found himself driving out northwards in search of the mysterious Mr. Doe, carrying the postal order with him.

The door of the villa was opened by a neatly dressed, elderly woman whom he had never seen before. Mr. Egg inquired for Mr. John Doe.

"He doesn't live here. Never heard of him."

Monty explained that he wanted the gentleman who had purchased the cat.

"Cat?" said the woman. Her face changed. "Step inside, will you? George!" she called to somebody inside the house, "here's a gentleman called about a cat. Perhaps you'd like to——" The rest of the sentence was whispered into the ear of a man who emerged from the sitting-room, and who appeared to be, and was in fact, her husband.

George looked Mr. Egg carefully up and down. "I don't know nobody here called Doe," said he; "but if it's the late tenants you're wanting, they've left. Packed and went off in a hurry the day after the old gentleman was buried. I'm the caretaker for the landlord. And if you've missed a cat, maybe you'd like to come and have a look out here."

He led the way through the house and out at the back door into the garden. In the middle of one of the flower-beds was a large hole, like an irregularly shaped and shallow grave. A spade stood upright in the mould. And laid in two lugubrious rows upon the lawn were the corpses of some very dead cats. At a hasty estimate, Mr. Egg reckoned that there must be close on fifty of them.

"If any of these is yours," said George, "you're welcome to it. But they ain't in what you might call good condition."

"Good Lord!" said Mr. Egg, appalled, and thought, with pleasure of Maher-shalal-hashbaz, tail erect, welcoming him on the Maitlands' threshold. "Come back-and tell me about this. It's—it's unbelievable!"

It turned out that the name of the late tenants had been Proctor. The family consisted of an old Mr. Proctor, an invalid, to whom the house belonged, and his married nephew and the nephew's wife.

"They didn't have no servant sleeping in. Old Mrs. Crabbe used to do for them, coming in daily, and she always

told me that the old gentleman couldn't abide cats. They made him ill like—I've known folks like that afore. And, of course, they had to be careful, him being so frail and his heart so bad he might have popped off any minute. What it seemed to us when I found all them cats buried, like, was as how young Proctor had killed them to prevent the old gentleman seeing 'em and getting a shock. But the queer thing is that all them cats look to have been killed about the same time, and not so long ago, neither."

Mr. Egg remembered the advertisement, and the false name, and the applicants passed out by a different door, so that none of them could possibly tell how many cats had been bought and paid for.

And he remembered also the careful injunction to bring the cat at six o'clock precisely, and the whistling lad with the basket who had appeared on the scene about a quarter of an hour after them. He remembered another thing—a faint miauling noise that had struck upon his ear as he stood in the hall while Jean was saying good-bye to Maher-shalal-hashbaz, and the worried look on Mrs. Proctor's face when she had asked if Jean was fond of her pet. It looked as though Mr. Proctor junior had been collecting cats for some rather sinister purpose. Collecting them from every quarter of London. From quarters as far apart as possible—or why so much care to take down names and addresses?

"What did the old gentleman die of?" he asked.

"Well," said Mrs. George, "it was just heart-failure, or so the doctor said. Last Tuesday week he passed away in the night, poor soul, and Mrs. Crabbe that laid him out said he had a dreadful look of horror on his poor face, but the doctor said that wasn't anything out of the way, not with his disease. But what the doctor didn't see, being too busy to come round, was them terrible scratches on his face and arms. Must have regular clawed himself in his agony—oh,

dear; oh, dear! But there! Anybody knew as he might go off at any time like the blowing out of a candle."

"I know that, Sally," said her husband. "But what about them scratches on the bedroom door? Don't tell me he did that, too. Or if he did, why didn't somebody hear him and come along to help him? It's all very well for Mr. Timbs—that's the landlord—to say as tramps must have got into the house after the Proctors left, and put us in here to look after the place, but why should tramps go for to do a useless bit of damage like that?"

"A 'cartless lot, them Proctors, that's what I say," said Mrs. George. "A-snoring away, most likely, and leaving their uncle to die by himself. And wasn't the lawyer upset about it, neither! Coming along in the morning to make the old gentleman's will, and him passed away so sudden. And seeing they came in for all his money after all, you'd think they might have given him a better funeral. Mean, I call it—not a flower, hardly—only one half-guinea wreath—and no oak—only elm and a shabby lot of handles. Such trash! You'd think they'd be ashamed."

Mr. Egg was silent. He was not a man of strong imagination, but he saw a very horrible picture in his mind. He saw an old, sick man asleep, and hands that quietly opened the bedroom door, and dragged in, one after the other, sacks that moved and squirmed and mewed. He saw the sacks left open on the floor, and the door being softly shut and locked on the outside. And then, in the dim glow of the night-light, he saw shadowy shapes that leapt and flitted about the room—black and tabby and ginger—up and down, prowling on noiseless feet, thudding on velvet paws from tables and chairs. And then, plump up on the bed—a great ginger cat with amber eyes—and the sleeper waking with a cry—and after that a nightmare of terror and disgust behind the locked and remorseless door.

A very old, sick man, stumbling and gasping for breath, striking out at the shadowy horrors that pursued and fled him—and the last tearing pain at the heart when merciful death overtook him. Then, nothing but a mewing of cats and a scratching at the door, and outside, the listener, with his ear bent to the keyhole.

Mr. Egg passed his handkerchief over his forehead; he did not like his thoughts. But he had to go on, and see the murderer sliding through the door in the morning—hurrying to collect his innocent accomplices before Mrs. Crabbe should come—knowing that it must be done quickly and the corpse made decent—and that when people came to the house there must be no mysterious miaulings to surprise them.

To set the cats free would not be enough—they might hang about the house. No; the water-butt and then the grave in the garden. But Maher-shalal-hashbaz—noble Maher-shalal-hashbaz had fought for his life. He was not going to be drowned in any water-butts. He had kicked himself loose (“and I hope,” thought Mr. Egg, “he scratched him all to blazes”), and he had toiled his way home across London. If only Maher-shalal-hashbaz could tell what he knew! But Monty Egg knew something, and he could tell.

“And I *will* tell, what’s more,” said Monty Egg to himself, as he wrote down the name and address of Mr. Proctor’s solicitor. He supposed it must be murder to terrify an old man to death; he was not sure, but he meant to find out. He cast about in his mind for a consoling motto from the *Salesman’s Handbook*, but, for the first time in his life, could find nothing that really fitted the case.

“I seem to have stepped regularly out of my line,” he thought sadly; “but still, as a citizen——”

And then he smiled, recollecting the first and last aphorism in his favourite book :

To Serve the Public is the aim  
Of every salesman worth the name.



R. N. CURREY

*The Black Dog*



## THE BLACK DOG

**I**T was a short step from discovering that Wentworth Jackson, the proprietor of the kola-kola business, spied on his workmen in the form of a black dog, to realising that he was responsible for the prolonged lack of rain.

Certainly he, though a pure black of no education, had profited from the drought. His fifteen barrows, threading their way through the streets like ice-cream tricycles—except that they bore such mottoes as “Jehovah Our Defence” and “Moses, the War Dog”—increased to twenty at this time. Previously they had kept to the shabby one-storey rows of the negro and coloured parts of Clintonville, but now they ventured among the white, palm-lined section that models itself on the Miami, and consumes its cold drinks in drug-stores.

The fourteen-year-old black boy, Kenneth Grant, was sent with a coloured man called José Diaz into Victoria Street, where the post office, a bank, and a couple of large stores are. Through the heat of the day Kenneth pushed the newly-painted barrow—obscurely labelled “Done Beholding”—up and down the glaring white street-edge. Chauffeurs, carters, errand-boys, and even lesser clerks exchanged coins for the many-coloured liquids (of which kola was only one) ranged in bottles along the barrow. Kenneth, who had been taken on only that morning, was impressed, and disposed to think well of his boss.

“Went Jackson sho’ knows how to make de money!” he commented.

José, who had been calculating how much more commission he would have been making in a cheaper street, snarled.

"He knows how to squeeze out his grapefruit!" he said. "Yo' wait till we get back to-night, Kennet bo'!"

That night, when half asleep, Kenneth went up with José to hand in the takings, Wentworth Jackson turned on him with an unnecessary display of bad teeth.

"Kennet Grant, yo' new bo.' Gir over to de fac'ry to fill up de bottles an' load de barrows fo' to-morrow! Gir along!"

The factory stood next to Wentworth Jackson's house on the edge of the Minta Gully, a bone-dry watercourse that became a raging torrent every three years or so, and had once in living memory washed away the entire suburb-village of Sarah's End. It was a low, corrugated-iron erection protected by the trees of the gully from the life-giving breeze off the sea. In the "yard" outside the factory door stood the empty barrows. A long fire at the far end, over which cauldron-like pots of syrupy liquid swung, filled the place with a glare that reminded Kenneth of Evangelist Armstrong's week-by-week pictures of hell.

The heat was unspeakable. The flames shone on the naked sweating torsos of the three men who mixed and cooked the liquids, as they moved very slowly between the fire and the tables. Except that the figures moved slowly, thought Kenneth, as he filled bottles at a row of large (ex-beer) barrels, he would be sure that he had died suddenly and gone there. Only when one of them lolled back against a wall and another sat down on a table was he reassured.

He filled the bottles, one green, two red, one purple, two yellow, and carried them to the door. Suddenly there was a step outside and the figures were galvanised into tortured movement. Kenneth, a bottle in each hand, nearly screamed when one of them turned furtively towards the door and began to laugh.

"It's jest a darg, bo's ! Jest a darg ! Yo' sho' did skeer us peerin' in like boss Jackson, darg ! Gir along !"

He threw a lump of charred wood good-humouredly into the doorway. The black dog that was slinging through in the shadow of the wall, leapt quickly sideways and made off.

The men began to slack again. All were sitting or lolling now, laughing or cursing according to the degree of their exhaustion. There was a general feeling of relief that it had been only a dog instead of Wentworth Jackson, but to Kenneth the long, completely black body, the thin legs, the eyes that glowed strangely in the pointed face, seemed of a piece with the hot shed filled with the torturing flames.

Working like a slow automaton, he filled the bottles and set them round the barrows. One green, two red, one purple, two yellow—they glinted in the firelight as he carried them across to the door. Thirteen barrows. Fourteen.

Then, suddenly, the figures about the fire were lashed into feverish activity again.

By the time Wentworth Jackson was round the door they were working at full tilt, but he came right over to them. Big and fierce in the light of the fire, he stood over them and began to shout. "You t'iefin' scoundrels, slackerin' off when my back turned away ! You t'iefin' mongoose——"

The firelight shone on his foul teeth, as he became rapidly incoherent. He seemed to Kenneth as fluent as the Evangelist Armstrong. The men shrivelled before him.

Then, for no comprehensible reason, he seized the man who had thrown the stick at the dog, and began to shake him.

"Yo' t'iefin' mongoose, John Jeffries ! Yo' ti'efin John Crow ! Yo' the wors' slacker ob dem all ! Yo' the leader in vice ! Nex' time, John Jeffries, I t'row you out !"

He threw the man heavily against the table as he went out.

Jefferies, a little out of breath, picked himself up carefully, asking in tones of astonishment :

“Fo’ why was he craas jest on me ? Ah’d sho’ like to murder dat ol’ debbil !”

Next morning, over his breakfast of corn-meal, Kenneth outlined the events of the night before to his mother. Mary Grant had a reputation for “praphecy” that was valid not only in her own village but in her own family.

“An’ I sho’ was skeered o’ de black darg !” concluded Kenneth.

“Yo’ did right to be skeered, Kennet bo’ ! Dat darg ain’t a darg at all——”

Kenneth stared up at his mother.

“Dat darg ain’t a darg at all,” she pursued. “Dat darg’s Went Jackson, peerin’ roun’ to see who ain’t woikin’. It made him mad when Jeffries t’rew a stick at him.”

She fell silent then, sitting back in a semi-trance that she apparently judged to be enough for private utterances. Kenneth, hurriedly finishing his corn-meal, rushed off to the factory to spread his mother’s “praphecy” that the black dog was Went Jackson.

José, who prided himself on his freedom from negro superstitions, pooh-poohed the idea.

“It don’t make sense,” he objected. “A man cyan’ be a darg.”

“Ah s’picion de praphetess right,” said one of the negroes who had been at the factory the night before. “Or fo’ why was Went Jackson so crass on Jeffries ?”

“Sho’ dat’s what ah say las’ night,” agreed Jefferies. “Fo’ why was he done craas on me ? Ahd’ sho’ like to murder dat debbil !”

“Well,” said a man who had not yet spoken, “yo’ got yo’ chance. Jes’ wait till the darg come back to-night, and kill him wid yo’ inachete. Dat’ll make Went Jackson wake up in de marnin’ wid his t’roat cut across !”

"Dat'll sho' learn him not to come peerin'roun' !" laughed somebody else, but Jefferies stood back at this.

"Dey'd sho' say Ah'd done it. Ah'd sho' swing for it !"

"Dey cyan' prison yo' for killing a darg from up de gully !" sneered José. "Ah stay behind to-night, and Ah kill him fo' you !"

When the dog came that night a rather less assured José was waiting for it behind the door with a machete. Kenneth, filling a bottle twenty feet away, saw him hit out hard at the low, slinking head. The dog leapt swiftly as the blade flashed out of the dark, and yelped shrilly as it caught its right fore-paw. It ran off on three legs, crying pitifully, and leaving a trickle of blood.

José, frightened now, squatted shivering by the door with the machete in his hand. He made no attempt to go after the dog, and nobody tried to persuade him.

Then, next day, which was Sunday, came the sensation.

There were clouds in the sky, signs that a break in the drought was just possible. Evangelist Armstrong was going to pray for rain. If prayer had been good policy in the completely uncompromising weeks preceding, it would be stupid to neglect it when the gods seemed to be hesitating. The little stone church was packed. There was not yet an actual shortage of water to drink, but the pastures were dry and the cattle ill for want of greenstuff. Among the children and even some of the grown-ups an epidemic of suppurating sores on the hands and feet had broken out.

As Wentworth Jackson came in, after the bell had started to ring, the black and brown faces turned inquiringly towards him, then became open-mouthed and open-eyed in astonishment and horror.

Wentworth Jackson's right hand was bandaged !

Throughout the service, the congregation, who had all heard the story of the black dog by now, stared at him.

Although the rough benches that served as pews were packed, Wentworth Jackson sat with clear space to either side of him, while those in the rows immediately in front and behind appeared to lean away from him.

Evangelist Armstrong, who had come into the pulpit gratified by the size of his congregation, soon began to feel that hymns, lessons, and prayers were not getting the attention they deserved. He could not know that even his fervent prayer that the rain might at last come was academic compared with some of the primitive emotions stirring in the breasts of those about him.

It seemed a matter of course that the white-clad congregation, reinforced by Sunday loungers in torn khaki, should collect in Mary Grant's "yard" as soon as the service was over, and Mary Grant had not held her position as "praphetess" since little more than a girl without knowing how to deal with them.

She gave them time, first, to exchange the latest bulletins. Wentworth Jackson had complained to somebody who could not avoid speaking to him that he had got a drought-sore on his hand—a chile sho wouldn't believe that! And he was going to bed now because his hand was all inflamed—well, we'd better keep our eyes skinned fo' the lil' black darg!

She came on to the tiny verandah then, and sitting back in her rocking-chair, closed her eyes. The crowd stopped chattering to watch her.

"Send us rain, Lawd," she gabbled. "Send us rain fo' . . . cows, fo' de hens . . . guinea grass . . . dis fruitful earth. Send us rain, Lawd! Send us rain!"

As she went on her sentences became clearer and more staccato. The crowd hung on her words.

"A debbil is holdin' back de good Lawd's rain!" she announced. "A debbil who make his money from de thirst of de Lawd's people. . . . A debbil who peers in on his workmen



in de shape of a 'bombination of sin . . . in de shape of a black darg !

"De black darg am wounded in de right-hand front paw. Kill de black darg ! Kill de black darg dead ! Hallelujah ! Praise de Redeemer ! Kill de debbil who hold back de good Lawd's rain !"

As she spoke her eyes rolled slowly backwards. She lay back in the chair now with only the whites exposed. As she spoke she pointed at a growing white cloud with a perceptible fringe of black.

"Kill de debbil now," she urged, "befo' he use de water to quench the fires of hell. Kill de black darg now ! Search up de gully now fo' de black darg !"

The mixed crowd of worshippers and loungers turned shouting, and set off at a half-run for the gully. Kenneth, running beside, saw José and Jefferies at their head.

A shot proclaimed the discovery of the trail of dried blood. It led through a barbed wire fence and down into the bone-dry gully. The dog had evidently bled badly. The brown drops could easily be followed at a run over the stones. The crowd, bloodthirsty now, slithered sweating along the dried water-course. If the leaders had lost the trail they would have swept forward and blotted it out, but José, with the expression on his face of a man fighting for his life, followed it as a hound follows the trail of a fox.

They had gone about half a mile when José suddenly shouted, an unorthodox view-haloo which did not fail to stir their hunter's blood. A hundred yards ahead, where the tunnel of trees closed over the gully, a black dog, walking uncertainly on three legs, appeared from among some low bushes, and seeing the hunt coming towards it, began to run weakly up the gully.

The hunt became cunning. It stopped. Called coaxingly. Whistled. But the half-wild creature was terrified. It looked

round once and then scuffled on. The pursuit began to lengthen out, the young and lean pulling ahead. To Kenneth, struggling to keep up with José and Jefferies, the shouting, the scuffling on the stones, everything about the chase was exhilarating.

The black dog struggled hard to keep its lead. It took another mile of hard running before the leaders began to close in on it. The trees grew thick over the gully here, but they were near enough to see it in the half-light, stumbling pitifully over the rough ground. When at last José, Jefferies, and one or two others cornered it against the steep bank, it turned savagely on José and bit deep into his arm before Jefferies managed to get it over the head with his machete.

The kill was marked by loud cries from those who, like Kenneth, were immediately behind José and Jefferies, but as the rest straggled up to look at the hacked-up skinny corpse, half-eaten already by mange and ticks, a strained silence fell.

Then someone looking up through a gap in the roof of trees, cried out in a voice full of awe :

“Look at de clouds, bo’s ! It’s gonna rain ! It’s gonna rain ! We sho’ hab killed de debbil dat hold back de good Lawd’s rain !”

There was a chorus of “Amen !” and “Hallelujah !” as the crowd began to remember that it was, after all, on a holy mission, but a practical voice cut in :

“We better get out o’ de gully den, or we all be washed away !”

As the last of them scrambled out on to the rough sloping grassland above, the sky opened.

Lightning, thunder and sheet rain seemed to strike the earth simultaneously. In the first instant, white Sunday clothes and brown disreputable ones were reduced to drenched rags clinging to black and brown bodies. The workers of the Lord’s will, overwhelmed now with the magnitude of their

blessing, struggled head-down against the massive downpour. Every person there had at some time seen the gully fill to the brim in a few minutes. Some remembered the time when its flood devastated the country-side. They pressed against the solid wall of water to get as far away from the gully as possible.

As they pushed, holding hands in groups of three or four, towards the rough road down to Sarah's End, every groove or hollow became a stream of water. The road, when they reached it, was a knee-deep torrent. Nobody could get home through a mile and a half of that. They struggled back from it to find a thin sheet of water spreading over the baked, impermeable fields.

At intervals the lightning flashed like smudged lurid gold behind the rain, and the thunder crashed across the exposed hill-side. They had all known lightning and thunder as bad as this, but it had never come to them, as to-day, under a deep sea of rain.

Some climbed into trees, less afraid of the dancing lightning than of the omnipresent water. Others, including Kenneth, José and Jefferies, reached Sarah's End, soon after the rain stopped, over fenced properties that were only ankle-deep. From Mary Grant's veranda they watched the flood sweep over the edge of the gully, and tug away Wentworth Jackson's house as if it had been one of his own rotten teeth. The crumpled wooden walls swung downstream with a quaint following of highly-coloured barrows.

"De Evangelist was reskin' himself to craas to de house an' warn Went Jackson," observed the prophetess, "but Ah tol' him Went Jackson was up de gully. Blessed be de name of the Lawd!"



SHERIDAN LE FANU

*Wicked Captain Walsbave*



## WICKED CAPTAIN WALSHAWE

A VERY odd thing happened to my uncle, Mr. Watson, of Haddlestone ; and to enable you to understand it, I must begin at the beginning.

In the year 1822, Mr. James Walshawe, more commonly known as Captain Walshawe, died at the age of eighty-one years. The Captain in his early days, and so long as health and strength permitted, was a scamp of the active, intriguing sort ; and spent his days and nights in sowing his wild oats, of which he seemed to have an inexhaustible stock.

Captain Walshawe was very well known in the neighbourhood of Wauling, and very generally avoided there. He had quitted the service in 1766, at the age of twenty-five, immediately previous to which period his debts had grown so troublesome that he was induced to extricate himself by running away with and marrying an heiress. He was quartered in Ireland, at Clonmel, where was a nunnery, in which, as pensioner, resided Miss O'Neill, or as she was called in the country, Peg O'Neill, the heiress.

Her situation was the only ingredient of romance in the affair, for the young lady was decidedly plain, though good-humoured looking, with that style of features which is termed potato ; and in figure she was a little too plump, and rather short. But she was impressible ; and the handsome young English lieutenant was too much for her monastic tendencies, and she eloped. They took up their abode at Wauling, in Lancashire.

Here the Captain amused himself after his fashion, sometimes running up, of course, on business to London. He spent her income, frightened her out of her wits, with oath and threats, and broke her heart.

Latterly she shut herself up pretty nearly altogether in her room. She had an old, rather grim, Irish servant-woman in attendance upon her. This domestic was tall, lean, and religious, and the Captain knew instinctively she hated him; and he hated her in return, and often threatened to put her out of the house, and sometimes even to kick her out of the window.

Years passed away, and old Molly Doyle remained still in her original position. Perhaps he thought that there must be somebody there, and that he was not, after all, very likely to change for the better.

He tolerated another intrusion, too, and thought himself a paragon of patience and easy good-nature for so doing. A Roman Catholic clergyman, in a long black frock, with a low standing collar, and a little white muslin fillet round his neck—tall, sallow, with blue chin, and dark steady eyes—used to glide up and down the stairs, and through the passages; and the Captain sometimes met him in one place and sometimes in another. But by a caprice incident to such tempers he treated this cleric exceptionally, and even with a surly sort of courtesy, though he grumbled about his visits behind his back.

Well, the time came at last, when poor Peg O'Neill—in an evil hour Mrs. James Walshawe—must cry, and quake, and pray her last. The doctor came from Penlynden, and was just as vague as usual, but more gloomy, and for about a week came and went oftener. The cleric in the long black frock was also daily there. And at last came that last sacrament in the gates of death, when the sinner is traversing those dread steps that never can be retraced.



The Captain drank a great deal of brandy and water that night, and called in Farmer Dobbs, for want of better company, to drink with him ; and told him all his grievances, and how happy he and “the poor lady upstairs” might have been had it not been for liars, and pick-thanks, and tale-bearers, and the like, who came between them—meaning Molly Doyle—whom, as he waxed eloquent over his liquor, he came to curse and rail at by name, with more than his accustomed freedom. And he described his own natural character and amiability in such moving terms that he wept maudlin tears of sensibility over his theme ; and when Dobbs was gone, drank some more grog, and took to railing and cursing again by himself ; and then mounted the stairs unsteadily to see “what the devil Doyle and the other —— old witches were about in poor Peg’s room.”

When he pushed open the door, he found some half-dozen crones, chiefly Irish, from the neighbouring town of Hackleton, sitting over tea and snuff, etc., with candles lighted round the corpse, which was arrayed in a strangely cut robe of brown serge. She had secretly belonged to some order—I think the Carmelite, but I am not certain—and wore the habit in her coffin.

“What the d—— are you doing with my wife ?” cried the Captain, rather thickly. “How dare you dress her up in this—trumpery, you—you cheating old witch ; and what’s that candle doing in her hand ?”

I think he was a little startled, for the spectacle was grisly enough. The dead lady was arrayed in this strange brown robe, and in her rigid fingers, as in a socket, with the large wooden beads and cross wound round it, burned a wax candle, shedding its white light over the sharp features of the corpse. Molly Doyle was not to be put down by the Captain, whom she hated, and accordingly, in her phrase, “he got as good as he gave.” And the Captain’s wrath

waxed fiercer, and he plucked the wax taper from the dead hand, and was on the point of flinging it at the old serving-woman's head.

"The holy candle, you sinner!" cried she.

"I've a mind to make you eat it, you beast," cried the Captain.

But I think he had not known before what it was, for he subsided a little sulkily, and he stuffed his hand with the candle (quite extinct by this time) into his pocket, and said he :

"You know devilish well you had no business going on with y-y-your d—— witchcraft about my poor wife, without my leave—you do—and you'll please to take off that d—— brown pinafore, and get her decently into her coffin, and I'll pitch your devil's waxlight into the sink."

And the Captain stalked out of the room.

"An' now her poor sowl's in prison, you wretch, be the mains o' ye ; an' may yer own be shut into the wick o' that same candle, till it's burned out, ye savage."

"I'd have you ducked for a witch, for twopence," roared the Captain up the staircase, with his hand on the banisters, standing on the lobby. But the door of the chamber of death clapped angrily, and he went down to the parlour, where he examined the holy candle for a while, with a tipsy gravity, and then with something of that reverential feeling for the symbolic, which is not uncommon in rakes and scamps, he thoughtfully locked it up in a press, where were accumulated all sorts of obsolete rubbish—soiled packs of cards, disused tobacco-pipes, broken powder-flasks, his military sword, and a dusky bundle of the *Flash Songster* and other questionable literature.

. . . . .

Captain Walshawe reigned alone for many years at Wauling. He was too shrewd and too experienced by this time to run violently down the steep hill that leads to ruin. Forty years

acted forcibly upon the gay Captain Walshawe. Gout supervened, and was no more conducive to temper than to enjoyment, and made his elegant hands lumpy at all the small joints, and turned them slowly into crippled claws. He grew stout when his exercise was interfered with, and ultimately almost corpulent. He suffered from what Mr. Holloway calls "bad legs," and was wheeled about in a great leathern-back chair, and his infirmities went on accumulating with his years.

I am sorry to say, I never heard that he repented, or turned his thoughts seriously to the future. On the contrary, his talk grew fouler, and his fun ran upon his favourite sins, and his temper waxed more truculent. But he did not sink into dotage. Considering his bodily infirmities, his energies and his malignities, which were many and active, were marvellously little abated by time.

It was a peculiarity of Captain Walshawe, that he, by this time, hated nearly everybody. My uncle, Mr. Watson, o. Haddlestone, was cousin to the Captain, and his heir at law, But my uncle had lent him money on mortgage of his estates and there had been a treaty to sell, and terms and a price were agreed upon, in "articles" which the lawyers said were still in force.

I think the ill-conditioned Captain bore him a grudge for being richer than he, and would have liked to do him an ill turn. But it did not lie in his way ; at least while he was living.

My Uncle Watson was a Methodist, and what they call a "class leader" ; and, on the whole, a very good man. He was now near fifty—grave, as becomed his profession—somewhat dry—and a little severe, perhaps—but a just man.

A letter from the Penlynden doctor reached him at Haddlestone, announcing the death of the wicked old Captain ; and suggesting his attendance at the funeral, and the expediency

of his being on the spot to look after things at Wauling. The reasonableness of this striking my good uncle, he made his journey to the old house in Lancashire incontinently, and reached it in time for the funeral.

The day turning out awfully rainy and tempestuous, my uncle persuaded the doctor and the attorney to remain for the night at Wauling.

There was no will—the attorney was sure of that; for the Captain's enmities were perpetually shifting, and he could never quite make up his mind as to how best to give effect to a malignity whose direction was being constantly modified.

Search being made, no will was found. The papers, indeed, were all right, with one important exception: the leases were nowhere to be seen. My uncle searched strenuously. The attorney was at his elbow, and the doctor helped with a suggestion now and then. The old serving man seemed an honest, deaf creature, and really knew nothing.

My Uncle Watson was very much perturbed. He fancied—but this possibly was only fancy—that he had detected for a moment a queer look in the attorney's face, and from that instant it became fixed in his mind that he knew all about the leases. Mr. Watson expounded that evening in the parlour to the doctor, the attorney and the deaf servant.

Ananias and Sapphira figured in the foreground, and the awful nature of fraud and theft, or tampering in any wise with the plain rule of honesty in matters pertaining to estates, etc., were pointedly dwelt upon; and then came a long and strenuous prayer, in which he entreated with fervour and aplomb that the hard heart of the sinner who had abstracted the leases might be softened or broken in such a way as to lead to their restitution; or that, if he continued reserved and contumacious, it might at least be the will of Heaven to bring him to public justice and the documents to light. The fact is, that he was praying all this time at the attorney.

When these religious exercises were over, the visitors retired to their rooms, and my Uncle Watson wrote two or three pressing letters by the fire. When his task was done, it had grown late ; the candles were flaring in their sockets, and all in bed, and, I suppose, asleep, but he.

The fire was nearly out, he chilly, and the flame of the candles throbbing strangely in their sockets shed alternate glare and shadow round the old wainscoted room and its quaint furniture. Outside were the wild thunder and piping of the storm, and the rattling of distant windows sounded through the passages, and down the stairs, like angry people astir in the house.

My Uncle Watson belonged to a sect who by no means reject the supernatural, and whose founder, on the contrary, has sanctioned ghosts in the most emphatic way. He was glad, therefore, to remember, that in prosecuting his search that day, he had seen some six inches of wax candle in the press in the parlour ; for he had no fancy to be overtaken by darkness in his present situation.

He had no time to lose ; and taking the bunch of keys—of which he was now master—he soon fitted the lock and secured the candle—a treasure in his circumstances ; and lighting it, he stuffed it into the socket of one of the expiring candles, and extinguishing the other, he looked round the room in the steady light, reassured. At the same moment an unusually violent gust of the storm blew a handful of gravel against the parlour window, with a sharp rattle that startled him in the midst of the roar and hubbub ; and the flame of the candle itself was agitated by the air.

My uncle walked up to bed, guarding his candle with his hand, for the lobby windows were rattling furiously, and he disliked the idea of being left in the dark more than ever.

His bedroom was comfortable, though old-fashioned. He shut and bolted the door. There was a tall looking-glass

opposite the foot of his four-poster, on the dressing-table between the windows. He tried to make the curtains meet, but they would not draw.

He turned the face of the mirror away, therefore, so that its back was presented to the bed, pulled the curtains together, and placed a chair against them, to prevent their falling open again. There was a good fire, and a reinforcement of round coal and wood inside the fender. So he piled it up to ensure a cheerful blaze through the night, and placing a little black mahogany table, with the legs of a Satyr, beside the bed, and his candle upon it, he got between the sheets, and laid his red night-capped head upon his pillow, and disposed himself to sleep.

The first thing that made him uncomfortable was a sound at the foot of his bed, quite distinct in a momentary lull of the storm. It was only the gentle rustle and rush of the curtains which fell open again; and as his eyes opened, he saw them resuming their perpendicular dependence, and sat up in his bed almost expecting to see something uncanny in the aperture.

There was nothing, however, but the dressing-table and other dark furniture, and the window-curtains faintly undulating in the violence of the storm. He did not care to get up, therefore—the fire being bright and cheery—to replace the curtains by a chair, in the position in which he had left them, anticipating possibly a new recurrence of the relapse which had startled him from his incipient doze.

So he got to sleep in a little while again, but he was disturbed by a sound, as he fancied, at the table on which stood the candle. He could not say what it was, only that he wakened with a start, and lying so in some amaze, he did distinctly hear a sound which startled him a good deal, though there was nothing necessarily supernatural in it.

He described it as resembling what would occur if you

fancied a thinnish table-leaf, with a convex warp in it, depressed the reverse way, and suddenly with a spring recovering its natural convexity. It was a loud, sudden thump, which made the heavy candlestick jump, and there was an end, except that my uncle did not get again into a doze for ten minutes at least.

The next time he awoke it was in that odd, serene way that sometimes occurs. We open our eyes, we know not why, quite placidly, and are on the instant wide awake. He had had a nap of some duration this time, for his candle-flame was fluttering and flaring, *in articulo*, in the silver socket. But the fire was still bright and cheery, so he popped the extinguisher on the socket, and almost at the same time there came a tap at his door, and a sort of crescendo "hush-sh-sh!" Once more my uncle was sitting up, scared and perturbed, in his bed.

He recollected, however, that he had bolted his door; and such inveterate materialists are we in the midst of our spiritualism, that this reassured him, and he breathed a deep sigh, and began to grow tranquil. But after a rest of a minute or two, there came a louder and sharper knock at his door; so that instinctively he called out: "Who's there?" in a loud, stern key. There was no sort of response, however.

The nervous effect of the start subsided; and after a while he lay down with his back turned towards that side of the bed at which was the door, and his face towards the table on which stood the massive old candlestick, capped with its extinguisher, and in that position he closed his eyes. But sleep would not revisit them. All kinds of queer fancies began to trouble him—some of them I remember.

He felt the point of a finger, he averred, pressed most distinctly on the tip of his great toe, as if a living hand were between his sheets, and making a sort of signal of attention or silence. Then again he felt something as large as a rat

make a sudden bounce in the middle of his bolster, just under his head.

Then a voice said : "Oh !" very gently, close at the back of his head. All these things he felt certain of, and yet investigation led to nothing. He felt odd little cramps stealing now and then about him, and then, on a sudden, the middle finger of his right hand was plucked backwards, with a light playful jerk that frightened him awfully.

Meanwhile the storm kept singing, and howling and ha-ha-hooing hoarsely among the limbs of the old trees and the chimney-pots ; and my Uncle Watson, although he prayed and meditated as was his wont when he lay awake, felt his heart throb excitedly, and sometimes thought he was beset with evil spirits, and at others that he was in the early stages of a fever.

He resolutely kept his eyes closed, however, and, like St. Paul's shipwrecked companions, wished for the day. At last another little doze seems to have stolen upon his senses, for he awoke quietly and completely as before—opening his eyes all at once, and seeing everything as if he had not slept for a moment.

The fire was still blazing redly—nothing uncertain in the light—the massive silver candlestick, topped with its tall extinguisher, stood on the centre of the black mahogany table as before ; and, looking by what seemed a sort of accident to the apex of this, he beheld something which made him quite misdoubt the evidence of his eyes.

He saw the extinguisher lifted by a tiny hand from beneath, and a small human face, no bigger than a thumb-nail, with nicely proportioned features peep from beneath it. In this Lilliputian countenance was such a ghastly consternation as horrified my uncle unspeakably.

Out came a little foot then and there, and a pair of wee legs, in short silk stockings and buckled shoes, then the rest of



the figure ; and, with the arms holding about the socket, the little legs stretched and stretched, hanging about the stem of the candlestick till the feet reached the base, and so down the Satyr-like leg of the table, till they reached the floor, extending elastically, and strangely enlarging in all proportions as they approached the ground, where the feet and buckles were those of a well-shaped, full-grown man, and the figure tapering upwards until it dwindled to its original fairy dimensions at the top, like an object seen in some strangely curved mirror.

Standing upon the floor he expanded, my amazed uncle could not tell how, into his proper proportions ; and stood pretty nearly in profile at the bedside, a handsome and elegantly shaped young man, in a bygone military costume, with a small laced, three-cocked hat and plume on his head, but looking like a man going to be hanged—in unspeakable despair.

He stepped lightly to the hearth, and turned for a few seconds very dejectedly with his back towards the bed and the mantelpiece, and he saw the hilt of his rapier glittering in the firelight ; and then walking across the room, he placed himself at the dressing-table, visible through the divided curtains at the foot of the bed. The fire was still blazing so brightly that my uncle saw him as distinctly as if half a dozen candles were burning.

The looking-glass was an old-fashioned piece of furniture, and had a drawer beneath it. My uncle had searched it carefully for the papers in the day-time ; but the silent figure pulled the drawer quite out, pressed a spring at the side, disclosing a false receptacle behind it, and from this he drew a parcel of papers tied together with pink tape.

All this time my uncle was staring at him in a horrified state, neither winking nor breathing, and the apparition had not once given the smallest intimation of consciousness that

a living person was in the same room. But now, for the first time, it turned its livid stare full upon my uncle with a hateful smile of significance, lifting up the little parcel of papers between his slender finger and thumb.

Then he made a long, cunning wink at him, and seemed to blow out one of his cheeks in a burlesque grimace, which, but for the horrific circumstances, would have been ludicrous. My uncle could not tell whether this was really an intentional distortion or only one of those horrid ripples and deflections which were constantly disturbing the proportions of the figure, as if it were seen through some unequal and perverting medium.

The figure now approached the bed, seeming to grow exhausted and malignant as it did so. My uncle's terror nearly culminated at this point, for he believed it was drawing near him with an evil purpose. But it was not so ; for the soldier, over whom twenty years seemed to have passed in his brief transit to the dressing-table and back again, threw himself into a great high-backed arm-chair of stuffed leather at the far side of the fire, and placed his heels on the fender.

His feet and legs seemed indistinctly to swell, and swathings showed themselves round them, and they grew into something enormous, and the upper figure swayed and shaped itself into corresponding proportions, a great mass of corpulence, with a cadaverous and malignant face, and the furrows of a great old age, and colourless glassy eyes ; and with these changes, which came indefinitely but rapidly as those of a sunset cloud, the fine regimentals faded away, and a loose, grey, woollen drapery, somehow, was there in its stead ; and all seemed to be stained and rotten, for swarms of worms seemed creeping in and out, while the figure grew paler and paler, till my uncle, who liked his pipe, and employed the simile naturally, said the whole effigy grew to the colour of tobacco ashes, and the clusters of worms into little wriggling

knots of sparks such as we see running over the residuum of a burnt sheet of paper.

And so with the strong draught caused by the fire, and the current of air from the window, which was rattling in the storm, the feet seemed to be drawn into the fireplace, and the whole figure, light as ashes, floated away with them and disappeared with a whisk up the capacious old chimney.

It seemed to my uncle that the fire suddenly darkened and the air grew icy cold, and there came an awful roar and riot of tempest, which shook the old house from top to base, and sounded like the yelling of a bloodthirsty mob on receiving a new and long-expected victim.

Good Uncle Watson used to say : "I have been in many situations of fear and danger in the course of my life, but never did I pray with so much agony before or since ; for then, as now, it was clear beyond a cavil that I had actually beheld the phantom of an evil spirit."

Now there are two curious circumstances to be observed on this relation of my uncle's, who was, as I have said, a perfectly veracious man.

First : The wax candle which he took from the press in the parlour and burnt at his bedside on that horrible night was unquestionably, according to the testimony of the old deaf servant, who had been fifty years at Wauling, that identical piece of "holy candle" which had stood in the fingers of the poor lady's corpse, and concerning which the old Irish crone, long since dead, had delivered the curious curse I have mentioned against the Captain.

Secondly : Behind the drawer under the looking-glass, he did actually discover a second but secret drawer, in which were concealed the identical papers which he had suspected the attorney of having made away with. There were circumstances, too, afterwards disclosed, which convinced my uncle that the old man had deposited them there preparatory to

burning them, which he had nearly made up his mind to do.

Now, a very remarkable ingredient in this tale of my Uncle Watson was this, that so far as my father, who had never seen Captain Walshawe in the course of his life, could gather, the phantom had exhibited a horrible and grotesque, but unmistakable resemblance to that defunct scamp in the various stages of his long life.

Wauling was sold in the year 1837, and the old house shortly after pulled down, and a new one built nearer to the river. I often wonder whether it was rumoured to be haunted, and, if so, what stories were current about it. It was a commodious and staunch old house, and withal rather handsome; and its demolition was certainly suspicious.

ERIC AMBROSE

*Carlton's Father*



## CARLTON'S FATHER

**M**Y friendship with John Carlton was never bound by very strong ties. He was about twelve when we first met, and I, although two years his senior, always lagged far behind him in class.

Yet, until he came, I automatically headed the lists and I suppose really I should have been jealous of him, but he was physically weak and my feeling of superiority led me to protect him from the bullying of others whom I disliked, so that he came to be looked upon as my protégé. He was likeable enough, did my prep when I felt lazy—which was pretty often after I'd been made a prefect—and during those last few months, when I was beginning to realise that play-days were drawing to a close, extraordinarily interesting.

He told me once, on one of those rare occasions when he unburdened his inner thoughts—the result of some particular cruelty on the part of a master—that his father was a scientist. I think it was the extraordinary way in which his face lit up as he spoke of his father which aroused my curiosity, and not so much the subject which seemed to suggest that if his father was a genius he was also a crank. He never talked to me about him again after that.

It is no exaggeration to say that young Carlton, at the age of sixteen, possessed a knowledge of physics and chemistry far in advance of any of his teachers. If a master or demonstrator was temporarily at a loss for a word Carlton could, and did, supply it, usually to his own detriment.

He was not popular with the staff. There were occasions when he would argue with them about established beliefs and, whether he was right or wrong, his powers of argument were superior to theirs, so that they sought means of arresting those powers and, being schoolmasters, they did not have far to seek.

Personally, I liked to listen to him because he was always so convincing, however outrageous the premises of his argument might be, and always as I listened to him I thought of the father whom he worshipped as a demi-God. That was why I asked him to stay with me during my last summer holidays, expecting in return a similar invitation to his home when I should meet his father. The invitation was not forthcoming, and I felt slighted. It wasn't that the fellow couldn't afford to entertain—he was always amply supplied with funds—nor did he ever pretend to excuse the omission.

I remember just before the last Founders' Day I asked him whether his father was coming. He was definitely uncomfortable then and said that his father was a busy man and could not leave his work. Then I tried a shot in the dark. "Well, why don't the other members of your family come—your sister or your mother?"

Of course, only an important schoolboy would have asked a question like that, and I could see that he was hurt. "I haven't a sister," he said, but he didn't mention his mother and I thought it must have been as I suspected, that she was dead.

When I left school I went to London, into my father's office. Then the war came and I was fortunate enough to come through unscathed. Afterwards I got a County Surveyor's job and went to live at Spelford. Of course I had forgotten all about Carlton by that time—in fact when I did see his name I never connected it with the precocious schoolboy I had known.

We, that is my department, had condemned a group of



farmhouses, for structural reasons, and it appeared that the group was Carlton's property. I had not seen the places myself, but judging from my assistant's report, they were pretty bad.

He recognised me as soon as he came into the room, and I thought he looked mightily relieved. For my part, I resolved to give him the benefit of my experience, but to keep rigidly to my duty—I had given the fellow too much in the past without his appreciating the fact.

Our conversation was cordial enough. We chatted about old times and those whom we had seen and those whom we had not, those who had succeeded and those who had failed. He himself, he told me, had become a scientist and, although he had published little, one day he would startle the world, and that day was not far off . . . and so on and so forth.

Frankly, I was disappointed when I heard him talking like that because I felt that he was a greater failure than all those others we had discussed, because his potentialities which had seemed so great were now proved to be merely the reflection of precocious eccentricity.

But at last he came to the subject of his call. He wanted me to realise that the premises were old, almost of historic interest, and even if my assistant had reported an overhang of four inches on some walls, they were in no way dangerous. Oh yes, he understood all about the "middle third" and although he had not calculated it in this case, he knew quite definitely that the structure hadn't moved within the last twenty years. However dry the summer had been, it was absurd to suggest that there had been a settlement, because it would have shown itself on the inside; wouldn't it?

I had always possessed a great respect for his oratorical powers and his ability to start from a fallacy and then argue logically, to prove you finally and utterly wrong. Experience had taught me that to take up the trend and answer him was

fatal. Besides, tucked away in the back of my mind was the memory that years before I had wanted to see this place of his and now, strange irony, I was to be almost the sole arbiter as to whether or not its structure should be razed to the ground.

"I'll come and lunch with you to-morrow," I said, "and we'll examine the parts which you say are unaffected."

"You mean, you'll want to see inside," he said.

"Yes, if it's convenient."

He hesitated ever so slightly, "I suppose it will be necessary?"

"I don't know about it being necessary, it may be quite useless," I said bluntly.

He hesitated again, as though not quite sure whether to leave matters as they were or take me into his confidence. "You see, MacIre," he said, "it's not myself I'm worrying about—but my father is engaged on some very delicate experiments, and I don't want him worried."

"Your father still alive!" I said, and apologised. "You see I never imagined"—and my voice trailed off in embarrassment.

"Yes, he is still alive, with my elder brother"—then he bit his lip—very noticeably, because he was angry at what he imagined to be an indiscretion.

But now there was a guard upon my tongue. I did not want to offend him, and it was obvious that he was hurt. I remembered at school he had never answered my query about his mother. "To-morrow," I said, "at lunch."

The next day I arrived punctually at Carlton's place. I had brought more instruments than I needed, but he had always overawed me by his use of scientific apparatus and this was where I was going to get my own back.

A glance at the buildings showed that I had a good case. If only the ass had made some attempt to tie in the bulges he might have had grounds on which to base his protest. But

once *inside* the building, my sympathies veered round a little towards him. The interior certainly was worth while preserving.

There was a man to serve at table, and a girl who brought in the food. After all, I felt, if the man could afford to live in some sort of style, he could afford to rebuild a few bulging walls, even if it did cost a little more to preserve the character of the place.

Only the two of us sat down to eat. "Your father isn't here?" I asked, and I think he must have detected the note of disappointment in my voice. At least *one* of the reasons for my presence there had been the hope of meeting his father.

He answered my question casually—except that he did not look at me—rather like an actor saying his lines to his dresser before a first-night—"No, they don't eat here. As a matter of fact they live in their own house—over there," and he pointed through the open window to a large, gabled, barn-like affair.

The meal was good enough, and the wine execrable. I complimented him on both, took his proffered cigar and came straight to the point. "Let's see that wall, Carlton."

So two of his men held the ladder and I plumbed the wall. I made a mental note to speak pretty sharply to Barter, my assistant. One part bulged five and three-eighths inches!

I was quite blunt with Carlton—there was no hope of saving the front—he'd have to pull the whole lot down, provide new foundations if he wanted to rebuild it, and that went for part of the flank also.

He took it quite differently from what I had expected. "If it's got to be done, MacIre, then it will be done. I'd like to leave the whole thing in your hands if it's permissible."

I told him it was, and gave him the name of a fairly honest builder.

"What will it cost?" he asked. It was the first time I had ever heard him mention money.

"About £350."

"Very good," he replied.

"But that's not all." He looked up at me—I had always been a good three inches taller than he—"Not all?" and now his face was a pale sickly colour.

"No, there's the other place where your father lives."

I knew he thought that he himself had drawn my attention to the place during dinner.

He did not answer, but just stood looking at me as though trying to make out what I was thinking—what my attitude towards him was.

"I'll have to plumb it," I said. I was feeling uncomfortable beneath his gaze. His eyes never left me as I had the ladder adjusted and got one of the men to hold the plumb aloft. I measured the overhang.

"It's five inches," I told him.

He said nothing.

"I can't pass it, you know."

He opened his mouth and seemed to have difficulty in speaking. "It's an historic building."

"Then you'd better protect it by rebuilding this front and the corner-returns. You can re-use the old bricks."

There was dead silence. He looked a picture of misery.

"Is it a question of money?" I asked, knowing perfectly well that it wasn't.

"Tell me, MacIre," he said after a long pause, "why do you have to condemn a building?"

"Because it is a danger to those people living in it, or likely to pass by it."

"And to which class does this belong?"

"Both."

"The walls are bulged, they can only fall outwards."

"That is probable."

"I will build piers against them."

"You couldn't make a proper job of it—the bulge is too big and there are several nasty cracks."

"I would build a continuous buttress."

That knocked me off my stride for a bit. It was absurd. "There would be a weakness over the windows."

"I would build the buttress over the windows."

I laughed. "Don't be an idiot, Carlton."

"But listen, MacIre, it shows no defect inside."

"Impossible," I said. "With a five-inch bulge! Still I'll have a look at it, then you won't be able to say I wasn't reasonable."

He just stared at me again—that look half of misery, half of interrogation. "Look here, MacIre, that wall won't fall. I'll deposit any sum in the bank you like to name, to cover you. I'll insure you against dismissal, or a claim for negligence."

"I'm sorry, Carlton," I said. "I would if I could—but you're being very childish. Why save that wall (how I wanted to know!) when you can build a new home for your father and brother with the greatest of ease?"

Then his attitude changed. He blustered, he took the strong-man attitude, he tried to do to *me*, what I had prevented others from doing to *him*. It was pitiful because he over-acted.

"I shall appeal to the court," he raved. "I shall bring the finest opinions money can buy. I will make you look a fool."

I could have been dignified then and walked off, but I knew what I wanted. "In that case, Carlton, I shall *have* to examine the inside of the house," I lied. I chuckled inwardly at my astuteness. Would to God that I had not been so clever!

"You cannot come in," he said.

"I have a right of entry," I reminded him, "at any reasonable time."

I felt that it was fully on the cards for him to call the two

labourers who had helped with the ladders and order them to throw me off the farm. My position would have been a particularly unpleasant one then, but one never knew just how Carlton would act.

"We'd better go in," he said.

I followed him to the front door of the place, not without a certain trepidation. He took a bunch of keys from his pocket and used two of them before the heavy oak door swung inwards on its hinges. I followed him in.

He switched on the light and shut the door behind us. We were in a completely closed lobby. On one of the side walls two wheels were fixed. He crossed and turned the nearer one, and for a moment or two, I did not realise what was happening. Then I saw that a wall was rising behind us, through the floor, to shut off the oaken door.

It seems strange to me now, that I just watched him and did nothing, but that is what did happen. Then he moved to the second wheel and turned that. Silently the wall in front of us began to drop, revealing a door. I felt as though I were leaving a submarine by means of a flooded chamber.

He unlocked the door, again using two keys, and we passed through.

I do not know which was the greatest surprise—the fact that the hall in which I found myself was brilliantly lit with electric candelabra in the middle of the day; or the fact that there was no sign of a door or window in the bare smooth walls, or the two people who were in the hall.

One of the figures rose as we entered and came towards us. That was another surprise. You see, I had understood Carlton to refer to his *elder* brother, but this person was a mere youth of eleven or twelve, except that the eyes possessed a shrewdness one would not ordinarily associate with a child.

The boy caught sight of me, took a step backwards, and his mouth dropped open. He turned to Carlton, and

I could see that there was anger in those shrewd eyes, but he did not speak.

Carlton advanced into the centre of the room and I followed him. I could see a second figure with its back towards us, reading.

At the sound of our footsteps, the seated figure rose and turned towards us.

That was another surprise. You see I had expected to see Carlton's father—a venerable old man with a long beard but he was a young man, tall and slim, no older than thirty.

And then I really did become afraid. It was he, Carlton, who had lied to me, and lured me into this place and not vice versa. I had been tricked. His whole attitude that afternoon had hardly been that of a normal, sane man, and I shivered as I thought what it might mean.

But however vague my fear had been, it took definite shape when Carlton addressed the young man. I was then certain beyond any doubt that I was dealing with a maniac.

"Father," he said, "this is the surveyor who has come to see our outer structure. I had to ask him in—because the law is on his side and it was the last hope."

The young man looked at me, and his look was not unkindly, but his words in answer to Carlton turned the fear that was upon me into something akin to terror.

"The law," he said, "well, well, well. But to which law does he refer?"

Nobody moved. "But there isn't anything wrong with the structure, is there, John—how can there be, eh, son?" and he laughed.

I could think of only one thing. No one knew where I was, I had not troubled to tell even Barter, and here I was with a group of people, one of whom wanted to support a brick wall with a continuous pier running over the windows, and another who believed he was the father of a man at least ten years his

senior. If there hadn't been the thought of those secret surrounding walls, I think my sense of humour might have come to the rescue.

I jumped as my sleeve was jerked. "My father is talking to you," said Carlton. I apologised. It was essential that I should humour these people.

"The walls are perfectly sound, you can see that. They have to be, or else the insulation would be useless. You *must* see that . . ."

Carlton interrupted him. "I have told him nothing, father."

The "father" looked surprised. "Cannot you trust him?"

"I thought he was my friend. We were at school together—you remember Esor B. MacIre?"

The young man smiled and looked at me. "Of course I do. There was a MacIre who was very good to you . . . invited you to his home during the holidays and protected you from the bullies. You wanted to bring him home, here . . . I remember, but that was impossible after we died."

I fell on my knees. I had always imagined myself a courageous man, but now before these people I was a craven.

"Let me go," I implored, "only let me go, I will not touch your farm."

"Get off your knees," said Carlton. "This isn't the MacIre I knew, the MacIre who was slightly contemptuous of fear and physical weakness."

But I could not rise. I just remained there, sweating, incapable of movement except for the chattering of my teeth, and the trembling in my palsied body. They helped me to rise and put me in a chair.

"Listen to me," said Carlton. "You have promised to spare the farm, but I am sorry, I do not believe you. The first thing you would do would be to communicate with the Medical Officer of Health and try to put us all in an asylum. Oh, yes



you would, even though you may not intend to at the moment. But you would not succeed. You see this *is* my father and this *is* my brother, and they *are* both dead, dead, do you understand? My mother, too, is dead, but she is not here . . . she . . . she is dead, too . . . but she is not here."

No one spoke. We all watched Carlton—the boy with his lips tightly drawn, the "father" smiling slightly.

"You heard my father say this room is insulated. It *is* insulated, insulated against something that is not material, not even spiritual. It is insulated against a dimension . . . against Time itself. For those who are in this room the wheel of time does not turn, there is duration but no Time. I cannot expect you to understand that."

Then something within me broke the spell. "You cannot insulate against Time," I cried, "not in a stationary system. You would have to travel with the speed of light and that is impossible, because the Lorentz transformation formula shows . . ." and I jabbered on to prove to him that he was raving.

Carlton waited till I was finished. "You are wrong as usual, MacIre. This room is outside the ordinary four dimensions of space and time. My father constructed this room when he was a young man. He was ready to give his secret to the world when the accident, the tragedy occurred. . . ." He paused for a moment.

"They were riding in a car, in the early days of motoring. I was only eleven years old, but I had spent much time in this room with my father and people called me precocious.

"They brought back my father and brother. They brought back my mother, too. I ordered the servants to take them to this place. They obeyed me because they thought I was soon to be the head of the household.

"The doctor who came said he could do nothing. I watched him, silently, noting his surprise when he saw that my

brother and my father did not die. My mother, you see, was already dead. . . .

"Then, I said to the doctor, 'please operate.' I know he thought it was hopeless, but because the bodies grew no older, no germs multiplied, and no poison spread, he operated and they lived. For them, the time in this room has remained February 17th, 1907. If they go from here, it is death, death as you understand it, and they will be unable to return to this dimension, the fifth dimension of a space—time—universe—in the second dimension of Time. That is why you must not disturb the fabric of this barn, lest you injure the insulation within."

"I understand," I said.

"I thought you would," said Carlton.

I got up from the chair. "Now that I understand, I will see that you are not molested." Once more I saw a way of escaping from these lunatics. "I think I had better be going."

I saw him look at the others and I did not like the look.

"I shall come and visit you, perhaps, in a few weeks' time."

Still there was silence. "Will you please open the door?"

"You cannot go," said Carlton.

I took up a menacing attitude. My courage seemed to have returned. "Why not?"

"Because if you go outside, you will die."

I laughed uneasily. "I'll take the risk."

"But I won't," said Carlton. "You see they might hang me for murder. Tell me honestly, did you enjoy the wine at lunch?"

"It was horrible," I said, smiling at his delightfully inconsequential remark.

"That was because I poisoned it. You see, whilst time does not exist in this room time rolls on outside. Actually you died about seven minutes ago, according to my calculations."

I laughed, roared with laughter, genuine, hysterical

laughter. So mad were they that I had almost become convinced by their talk.

"You will write a letter to Barter, your assistant, and tell him he is not to worry about the walls here."

"Certainly," I said. So I wrote: "You need not trouble about the wall here as it is only four and a half inches out of plumb." I signed it. I knew that as soon as Barter got that note he would suspect that either I was crazy, and search for me here, or foul play.

According to Carlton that was "three weeks " ago. It is a strange thing that I do not want to escape from this place any more, but many strange things have happened. My watch ticks but does not "go." They allowed me to shave on what seemed to be the second day, but my beard has not grown since. I have eaten nothing since I have been here. They say that it is because there is no Time, only duration here. I spend my duration either in reading or listening to Carlton's father. They cannot have given Barter the note yet or he would have come here. They tell me I am dead, so I suppose it doesn't matter much, what happens.

ESOR. B. MACIRE.

The above document was sent to me by a gentleman who found it between the leaves of a volume of the *Encyclopædia Britannica* which he purchased in a second-hand book shop. It is without doubt in the handwriting of Esor B. MacIre, who was my superior until his disappearance in 1934.

I found it very interesting reading, but hardly what I would have expected from the very sober County Surveyor. However, it serves one purpose—it strengthens the theory I gave to the police, when MacIre disappeared, that he had overworked and was still living in the district. He probably saw

the account in the local paper of the three male skeletons we discovered when we pulled down Carlton's Barn. Carlton himself was never found, he probably murdered the three. It was a strange place, that barn.

There is one point, however, which still worries me. The *Encyclopædia Britannica* in which the document was found, bore the name "Harold Carlton," written in faded ink.

I must admit that it seems strange that MacIre, who was probably unbalanced, should have taken the trouble to attend to such a small detail. Still, the ways of a madman, and I am convinced that MacIre was such, are strange and beyond understanding.

IVAN TURGENEV

*The Adventure of Second Lieutenant Bubnov*



## THE ADVENTURE OF SECOND LIEUTENANT BUBNOV

SECOND LIEUTENANT BUBNOV was promenading along one of the streets of a country town. Along the whole length of this street, which was over half a mile, stood only three houses, of which two were on the right and one on the left.

Since no more than two hours remained till dusk, the elderly townsfolk, women owners of the said three houses, had closed the shutters, driven the hens into the roosts and gone to bed. Second Lieutenant Bubnov walked along, his hands buried in his pockets, abandoning himself, as his custom was, to his favourite reflection as to how he would act if he were Napoleon.

Suddenly a man of short stature, attired in very unusual garments, approached him. Bubnov took him at first to be the landowner Telushkin, who had just returned from abroad, not because personally he had the honour of knowing Mr. Telushkin, but he had heard tales of the queer and strangely outlandish garments this gentleman wore. On the stranger's very first words he was undeceived.

Approaching the Second Lieutenant Bubnov, the man declared in off-hand tones, as if repeating a formula: "I am the Devil."

"Either he is drunk, or I am," thought the Lieutenant. "In either case it's unwise to remain here."

But the stranger smilingly made it impossible for him to budge an inch.

"You are not drunk, dear Ivan Andreevich Bubnov, for I really am the Devil."

Ivan thought again: "Either he is mad, or I am mad, so why should I stay with him?"

The stranger caught the lapel of his coat and spoke again loudly and decisively. "Bubnov! What would you do if you were Napoleon?"

Thought Bubnov, reassured: "Surely he must be the Devil . . ." and then aloud: "What do you want?"

"First, I want to convince you that I really am the Devil. Look over there. You see those nettles, now look carefully at what they shall do. What about a Cossack dance? A proper one?"

The nettles which were growing in profusion along the fences immediately broke into a Cossack dance in first-rate style.

"Good!" said the Devil, "and there will be no hitch as far as I am personally concerned either."

Then he began to play some astonishing personal tricks. He placed both his feet into his mouth and pulled them through the back of his neck. He took out his own eyes, and using both hands, merrily threw them about in the air; finally he presented his nose to Ivan Andreevich as a souvenir. The lieutenant unbuttoned his coat and put the nose into his side pocket.

"Now do you believe that I am the Devil?"

"Yes! Yes, I do. What do you want from me, my good friend?"

"Nothing, nothing at all! The fact is, I've been suffering from boredom, so I just dropped in to have a chat with you. Would you care to take a little stroll?"

"Delighted, I am sure." They started off together side by side like two old friends.

"What an extraordinary experience!" thought Ivan



Andreevich, "I must be having the D.T.'s." He caught at his moustache and tugged it as hard as he could. . . . His head creaked like wood.

"No need for you to worry, friend Ivan Andreevich, and besides, you may accidentally pull your head right off if you keep tugging like that . . . and without a head, as you know very well yourself, a man is not so handy as with one. But there! We'll try it."

The Devil caught Second Lieutenant Bubnov by his fore-lock and pulled off his head completely. Bubnov had every intention of wondering at this action, but without a head a man cannot even wonder. The Devil played about with Ivan's head; raised it to his nose and sniffed at it. Then he replaced it on the Second Lieutenant's body. Immediately the Lieutenant opened his mouth and made a jovial remark. Thus conversing, the two wandered out of the town and at last found themselves in a large wood.

"Look here, now," said Ivan Andreevich, "you aren't going to lead me into some gully to the vultures, are you? I cannot stand vultures."

"Oh, dear me, no! Of course not!" retorted the Devil.

They came to a great withered oak. On a branch of the tree an old raven was perched, croaking in a dreary drawl. In reality this raven was a crow, but in deeper reality it was the Devil's grandmother. The Devil never had a mother, only a grandmother. How this came about, even the Devil himself never knew.

"I am going to present you to my granny," he said to Ivan Andreevich.

"But I am wearing only my morning clothes," replied Bubnov.

"That will be all right," said the Devil, "but I must politely request you not on any account whatsoever to make the sign of the Cross, for this would deprive us of your pleasant

company. And now will you do me the favour of biting off the tip of my tail?"

With these remarkable words the Devil raised his tail, which was fluffy and soft as a cat's paw, right up to Ivan Andreevich's very lips.

"No! I shall not bite your tail!" cried Ivan Andreevich.

"Why not?"

"It would give you pain."

"Me? Goodness! Please be so kind as to bite it. Do not stand on ceremony. Please. . . ."

While he was speaking the accursed tail kept on thrusting itself into Ivan Andreevich's mouth. . . .

"But is this absolutely necessary?"

"Absolutely."

Second Lieutenant Bubnov was about to catch the Devil's tail with his right hand, but suddenly stopped, glanced at the Devil over his shoulder, and said: "I suppose your tail tastes rotten?"

"Not at all! Just wish for whichever dish you happen to like, and my tail will taste like that dish."

"I would like cucumber with honey!" said Ivan, after reflection.

And then he bit. . . .!

Indeed the Devil was right. The tail smacked of cucumber and honey, with just a shade of sulphur. But who would notice such a trifle?

Second Lieutenant Bubnov had hardly swallowed the fragment of tail when he suddenly found himself in a moderately tidy room. In a large old-fashioned arm-chair was seated an old hag with a largish nose, cracking nuts. The Devil led Ivan Andreevich to her.

"Granny," he said, "this is Second Lieutenant Ivan Andreevich Bubnov. Ivan Andreevich—my granny."

Having thus introduced them to each other, he pushed

a chair towards the Second Lieutenant and left them in order to don his horns.

The Lieutenant did not know how to begin ; not because he was unable, as the saying is, "to make conversation," but he did not know the name and patronymic of the Devil's grandmother, and could not think of how to address her : just "Madam" seemed somewhat awkward. . . . At last he made up his mind and began : "Dear Mistress . . ."

But the old woman opened her mouth in a strange manner and in a very hoarse voice uttered : "No needless words ! No needless words, Second Lieutenant Ivan Bubnov !"

It seemed to Ivan that the old woman's words took shape and were flying towards him in a kind of spiral screw. His embarrassment left him and he only nodded his head. The old woman went on cracking her nuts but kept staring at him, as if she expected him to speak. Ivan Andreevich was at his wit's end and sat in silence like a stone idol. Evidently this wearied the old woman, for suddenly she jumped up, caught Ivan Andreevich by his hands and started dancing all over the room with him, displaying incredible agility.

"Second Lieutenant, my little Cupid. Dance with me, darling !" she crooned as they danced.

Bubnov felt dizzy and cried out at last in despair : "Devil ! Devil ! Your granny has gone crazy !"

The Devil hurried in, now wearing his horns. He caught his grandmother by the armpits and deferentially sat her down in her place. Then in humble expressions he begged Ivan Andreevich to pardon his grandmother.

"But," he added, "I want to give you a good time. So now I will introduce you to my little grandchild. She is still very young, she has only a tiny tail as yet ; but you are an honourable gentleman. You will not take advantage of her inexperience. . . . Babebibobu, come here !"

From the next room came the Devil's grandchild. She

dropped a polite curtsy to Ivan Andreevich, and bashfully fell on her great-great-grandmother's neck.

Ivan Andreevich bowed to her, clicking his heels together. "What's her name?" he asked the Devil.

"Babebibobu," replied the Devil.

"Babeb . . . and so on isn't a Russian name," remarked the Second Lieutenant.

"We are foreigners," explained Babebibobu's grandfather.

Ivan Andreevitch pulled himself together and went over to kiss Babebibobu's hand, which she extended to him. He had time to notice that the little nails of her dainty little fingers were slightly bent down in the form of claws; besides, at the very instant of the kiss he felt a stinging sensation on his lips.

"Will you take a stroll with me in the garden?" Babebibobu asked in a whisper.

"I shall be delighted," replied Ivan Bubnov. The old woman whispered to the Devil. Evidently she was not in favour of the suggested walk. But the Devil shrugged his shoulders and turned away. . . . Bubnov left the room with the Devil's grandchild.

The Devil's garden was like many other gardens, nothing exceptional. But Ivan Andreevich noticed one peculiarity, all the plants were emitting groans as if growing were painful. Such was the arrangement of the Devil.

Babebibobu walked on in silence for a long time, but at last she lifted her little head, looked at Ivan Andreevich, sighed and said: "I love you, Bubnov."

The Second Lieutenant remembered her grandfather's admonition and replied good-naturedly: "Please compose yourself."

"I love you, Bubnov, and you must return my love," she repeated more endearingly. "I shall crown you with poppy, red as my cheeks; I shall feed you with the freshest,

of acorns ; I shall make you drunk with the juice of bracken and we shall be happy and virtuous ! Bubnov, I love you."

Bubnov looked at her. He was about to say : "And I love you, too, Babebi . . ." but suddenly it seemed to him that Babebibobu's eyes began contracting and expanding like those of a feline, while her nostrils distended and her teeth sharpened. . . . It suddenly seemed to him as if he were a mouse and she had become a cat. . . .

"No !" he said suddenly, "I cannot return your love. Let us return home."

"But where is home ?" she asked in a strange voice.

Ivan looked around. He was standing on the very top of a very high pillar and even so only on one leg ; his other leg was fluttering in the breeze like a flag. Up the pillar which was lathered and smeared with oil, many kinds of little imps were climbing with great difficulty. They were endeavouring to reach the top . . . and no doubt, Ivan Andreevich must have been appointed the reward for the winner of the race. Babebibobu was floating around him in the air, laughing malignantly. . . .

"Devil, you prove yourself a traitor," the Second Lieutenant said with difficulty.

"Children ! Children ! Have you got lost, or what ?" the Devil's voice resounded around them.

Both Ivan Andreevich and Babebibobu again found themselves in the garden. Not far away from them stood the Devil smiling pleasantly. . . .

"You do not know how to entertain a dear guest, little Babebi !" (so he always addressed her when displeased). "Please, come right over here with me, Ivan Andreevich, and leave this silly chit of a girl."

"Oh, indeed ! Silly chit of a girl, am I," retorted Babebibobu. "Why, already my horns are shooting. . . ." And

bending her head down, she pulled her hair asunder and showed Ivan Andreevich two tiny, dainty little horns.

Ivan Andreevich, who never in his life had learned any dancing, suddenly jumped, turned three times on one leg, made a *glissade, jetée assemblée, pas de zephyre*, stooped down and kissed the tip of Babebibobu's right horn; but as if jubilant at such a recognition the horn itself suddenly grew up and painfully struck the Second Lieutenant.

Half an hour later they were all seated round the table.

"Let's see," thought Ivan Andreevich, "what do these people have for dinner?"

They were seated in the following order: at the top of the table the old woman, the Devil's grandmother; on her right the Lieutenant; on the left of the old woman, her grandson, the Devil; to the left of the Devil and opposite the old lady, Babebibobu.

An enormously big covered tureen entered the room, pushed up close, curtsied and jumped on to the table.

"What do they eat?" wondered Bubnov. "But we'll soon see."

The old woman addressed her grandson: "Dear grandchild, we'd better marry Second Lieutenant Bubnov and Babebibobu, don't you think?"

"Of course," answered the grandchild.

Marry the Devil's granddaughter, what a strange idea! How curious the results to Second Lieutenant Bubnov! Suppose there were children, what then? What would be their social rank? Would they be nobles, or not? Or what condition of people? They would scarcely be able to enter a military college! "A most difficult situation this," he mused. "Why on earth did I eat the Devil's tail?"

"However," observed the Devil, "there can be no marriage without mutual consent. I am a good-hearted old grandfather, and love my Babebibobu; equally, for many years I

have the greatest esteem for my friend Ivan Andreevich. . . . Babebibobu! Tell me, do you love Second Lieutenant Bubnov?"

"Just doesn't she love him," exclaimed the old demon. "Only look at her. She is already licking her lips. . . ."

In very truth, the Devil's granddaughter, cocking her eyes and smiling grimly, was passing her red, red little tongue over her sharp little white teeth. . . .

"She will devour me," shouted Bubnov.

"May good digestion wait on appetite," remarked the Devil.

"How, appetite? What does it mean—appetite? I am an officer! I am a guest! Does one ever eat an officer? Does one ever eat a guest?"

"You ask for information and evidence," retorted the Devil, "that's easy at once! I have staying with me a German doctor who will prove to you as plain as twice two are four, that to devour you is possible, essential, becoming and pleasant."

"Were he even a thousand doctors he can prove nothing to me! Absolutely nothing! Decidedly nothing." The Second Lieutenant got furious, and began waving his arms about like a windmill. "I shall depart, confound you! I am going! What an idiot I was to eat part of your tail! I am going!"

Ivan Andreevitch tried to rise, but in vain. The arm-chair in which he sat turned into some kind of ugly spider and seized him with demoniacal force.

The Devil and his family almost split their sides with laughter watching the Lieutenant's frenzied and fruitless efforts. . . . The old woman's laughter extraordinarily resembled the old goat's bleating; Babebibobu screamed with enjoyment.

"Let me go!" groaned Ivan Andreevich. "Away with you, you devilish tribe in the name of . . ."

"Stop! Stop him!" shouted the Devil. "Do not let him make the sign of the Cross. . . ."

Babebibobu sprang, with a bloodthirsty smile, at the Second Lieutenant, and in one snap bit his right arm off. . . . At the same instant the lid came off the tureen, the poor Second Lieutenant was caught and thrown into the tureen. . . . When he had been seasoned with vinegar, oil, pepper grated powder, sulphur, cranberry juice, they devoured him, devoured him to the last little bone. All through the dinner singers and musicians were performing various overtures. . . . Babebibobu with especial relish ate the Second Lieutenant's heart, and the Devil nearly choked himself with an epaulette.

Next morning Second Lieutenant Bubnov was found in the same street of the town. He lay with his face to the fence and was as red as a poppy. They brought him back to consciousness. With terror he looked around, talking all sorts of nonsense; assuring them that he was feeling himself not there, but far away in three entirely alien stomachs. Only towards evening did he finally come to himself. After that he could never forget his meeting with the Devil, and often would say: "Were I Napoleon, I should exterminate all devils!"

He lived, however, to a great old age, did not resign his commission, and died a junior lieutenant.



A GHOST STORY OF LONG AGO

*The Sutor of Selkirk*



## THE SUTOR OF SELKIRK

ONCE upon a time there lived in Selkirk a shoemaker, by name Rabbie Heckspeckle, who was celebrated both for dexterity in his trade and for some other qualifications of a less profitable nature.

Rabbie was a thin, meagre-looking personage, with lank black hair, a cadaverous countenance, and a long, flexible secret-smelling nose. In short, he was the Paul Pry of the town. Not an old wife in the parish could buy a new scarlet rokelay without Rabbie knowing within a groat of the cost ; the doctor could not dine with the minister but Rabbie could tell whether sheep's-head or haggis formed the staple commodity of the repast ; and it was even said that he was acquainted with the grunt of every sow, and the cackle of every individual hen in his neighbourhood ; but this wants confirmation.

His wife, Bridget, endeavoured to confine his excursive fancy, and to chain him down to his awl ; but her interference met with exactly that degree of attention which husbands usually bestow on the advice tendered by their better halves—that is to say, Rabbie informed her that she knew nothing of the matter, that her understanding required stretching, and finally, that if she presumed to meddle in his affairs, he would be under the disagreeable necessity of giving her a top-dressing.

To secure the necessary leisure for his researches, Rabbie was in the habit of rising to his work long before the dawn ; and he was one morning busily engaged putting the finishing stitches to a pair of shoes for the exciseman when the door of

his dwelling, which he thought was carefully fastened, was suddenly opened, and a tall figure, enveloped in a large black cloak, and with a broad-rimmed hat drawn over his brows, stalked into the shop. Rabbie stared at his visitor, wondering what could have occasioned this early call, and wondering still more that a stranger should have arrived in the town without his knowledge.

"You're early afoot, sir," quoth Rabbie. "Lucky Wakerife's cock will no crawl for a good half-hour yet."

The stranger vouchsafed no reply ; but, taking up one of the shoes Rabbie had just finished, deliberately put it on, and took a turn through the room to ascertain that it did not pinch his extremities. During these operations Rabbie kept a watchful eye on his customer.

"He smells awfully," muttered Rabbie to himself ; "ane would be ready to swear he had just cam frae the plough-tail."

The stranger, who appeared to be satisfied with the effect of the experiment, motioned to Rabbie for the other shoe, and pulled out a purse for the purpose of paying for his purchase ; but Rabbie's surprise may be conceived when, on looking at the purse, he perceived it to be spotted with a kind of earthy mould.

"Gudesake," thought Rabbie, "this queer man maun hae howkit that purse out o' the ground. I wonder where he got it. Some folk say there are bags o' siller buried near this town."

By this time the stranger had opened the purse, and as he did so a toad and a beetle fell on the ground, and a large worm, crawling out, wound itself round his finger. Rabbie's eyes widened ; but the stranger, with an air of nonchalance, tendered him a piece of gold, and made signs for the other shoe.

"It's a thing morally impossible," responded Rabbie to

this mute proposal. "Mair by token, that I hae as good as sworn to the exciseman to hae them ready by daylight, which will no be long o' coming" (the stranger here looked anxiously towards the window); "and better, I tell you, to affront the king himself than the exciseman."

The stranger gave a loud stamp with his shod foot, but Rabbie stuck to his point, offering, however, to have a pair ready for his new customer in twenty-four hours; and, as the stranger, justly enough perhaps, reasoned that half a pair of shoes was of as little use as half a pair of scissors, he found himself obliged to come to terms, and seating himself on Rabbie's three-legged stool, held out his leg to the Sutor, who, kneeling down, took the foot of his taciturn customer on his knee, and proceeded to measure it.

"Something o' the splay, I think, sir," said Rabbie, with a knowing air.

No answer.

"Where will I bring the shoon to when they're done?" asked Rabbie, anxious to find out the domicile of his visitor.

"I will call for them myself before cock-crowing," responded the stranger in a very uncommon and indescribable tone of voice.

"Hout, sir," quoth Rabbie, "I canna let you hae the trouble o' coming for them yoursel'; it will just be a pleasure for me to call with them at your house."

"I have my doubts of that," replied the stranger, in the same peculiar manner; "and at all events, my house would not hold us both."

"It maun be a dooms sma' biggin'," answered Rabbie; "but noo that I hae ta'en your honour's measure——"

"Take your own!" retorted the stranger, and giving Rabbie a touch with his foot that laid him prostrate, walked coolly out of the house.

This sudden overturn of himself and his plans for a few

moments discomfited the Sutor ; but quickly gathering up his legs, he rushed to the door, which he reached just as Lucky Wakerife's cock proclaimed the dawn. Rabbie flew down the street, but all was still ; then ran up the street, which was terminated by the churchyard, but saw only the moveless tombs looking cold and chill under the grey light of a winter morn. Rabbie hitched his red night-cap off his brow, and scratched his head with an air of perplexity.

"Weel," he muttered, as he retraced his steps homewards, "he has warred me this time, but sorrow take me if I'm not up wi' him in the morn."

All day Rabbie, to the inexpressible surprise of his wife, remained as constantly on his three-legged stool as if he had been "yirked" there by some brother of the craft, for the space of twenty-four hours his long nose was never seen to throw its shadow across the threshold of the door ; and so extraordinary did this event appear that the neighbours, one and all, agreed that it predicted some prodigy : but whether it was to take the shape of a comet, which would deluge them all with its fiery tail, or whether they were to be swallowed up by an earthquake, could by no means be settled to the satisfaction of the parties concerned.

Meanwhile, Rabbie diligently pursued his employment, unheeding the concerns of his neighbours. What mattered it to him that Jenny Thrifty's cow had calved, that the minister's servant, with something in her apron, had been seen to go in twice to Lucky Wakerife's, that the laird's dairy-maid had been observed stealing up the red loan in the gloaming, that the drum had gone through the town announcing that a sheep was to be killed on Friday ?

The stranger alone swam before his eyes ; and cow, dairy-maid, and drum kicked the beam. It was late in the night when Rabbie had accomplished his task, and then placing the shoes at his bedside, he lay down in his clothes and fell asleep ;

but the fear of not being sufficiently alert for his new customer induced him to rise a considerable time before daybreak. He opened the door and looked into the street, but it was still so dark he could scarcely see a yard before his nose ; he therefore returned into the house, muttering to himself : "What the sorrow can keep him ?" when a voice at his elbow suddenly said :

"Where are my shoes ?"

"Here, sir," said Rabbie, quite transported with joy ; "here they are, right and tight, and mickle joy may ye hae in wearing them, for it's better to wear shoon than sheets, as the auld saying gangs."

"Perhaps I may wear both," answered the stranger.

"Gude save us," quoth Rabbie, "do ye sleep in your shoon ?"

The stranger made no answer ; but, laying a piece of gold on the table and taking up the shoes, walked out of the house.

"Now's my time," thought Rabbie to himself, as he slipped after him.

The stranger paced slowly on, and Rabbie carefully followed him ; the stranger turned up the street, and the Sutor kept close to his heels.

"Odsake, where can he be gaun ?" thought Rabbie, as he saw the stranger turn into the churchyard ; "he's making to that grave in the corner ; now he's standing still ; now he's sitting down. Gudesake ! what's come o' him ?" Rabbie rubbed his eyes, looked round in all directions ; but, lo and behold ! the stranger had vanished.

"There's something no canny about this," thought the Sutor ; "but I'll mark the place at ony rate," and Rabbie, after thrusting his awl into the grave, hastily returned home.

The news soon spread from house to house, and by the time the red-faced sun stared down on the town the whole of the inhabitants were in commotion ; and after having held sundry

consultations, it was resolved *nem. con.* to proceed in a body to the churchyard and open the grave which was suspected of being suspicious.

The whole population of the Kird Wynek turned out on this service. Sutors, wives, children, all hurried pellmell after Rabbie, who led his myrmidons straight to the grave at which his mysterious customer had disappeared, and where he found his awl still sticking in the place where he had left it.

Immediately all hands went to work ; the grave was opened ; the lid was forced off the coffin ; and a corpse was discovered, dressed in the vestments of the tomb, but with a pair of perfectly new shoes upon its long, bony feet. At this dreadful sight the multitude fled in every direction. Lucky Wakerife leading the van, leaving Rabbie and a few bold brothers of the craft to arrange matters as they pleased with the peripatetic skeleton.

A council was held, and it was agreed that the coffin should be firmly nailed up and committed to the earth. Before doing so, however, Rabbie proposed denuding his customer of his shoes, remarking that he had no more need for them than a cart had for three wheels. No objections were made to this proposal, and Rabbie, therefore, quickly coming to extremities, whipped them off in a trice. They then drove half a hundred tenpenny nails into the lid of the coffin, and, having taken care to cover the grave with pretty thick divots, the party returned to their separate places of abode.

Certain qualms of conscience, however, now arose in Rabbie's mind as to the propriety of depriving the corpse of what had been honestly bought and paid for. He could not help allowing that, if the ghost were troubled with cold feet, a circumstance by no means improbable, he might naturally wish to remedy the evil. But, at the same time, considering that the fact of his having made a pair of shoes for a defunct man would be an everlasting blot on the Heckspeckle escut-



cheon, and reflecting also that his customer, being dead in law, could not apply to any court for redress, our Sutor manfully resolved to abide by the consequences of his deed.

Next morning, according to custom, he rose long before the day, and fell to his work, shouting the old songs of the "Sutors of Selkirk" at the very top of his voice. A short time, however, before the dawn his wife, who was in bed in the back room, remarked that in the very middle of his favourite verse his voice fell into a quaver, then broke out into a yell of terror ; and then she heard a noise, as of persons struggling ; and then all was quiet as the grave.

The good dame immediately huddled on her clothes and ran into the shop, where she found the three-legged stool broken in pieces, the floor strewn with bristles, the door wide open, and Rabbie away ! Bridget rushed to the door, and there she immediately discovered the marks of footsteps deeply imprinted on the ground. Anxiously tracing them, on—and on—what was her horror to find that they terminated in the churchyard at the grave of Rabbie's customer !

The earth round the grave bore traces of having been the scene of some fearful struggle, and several locks of lank black hair were scattered on the grass. Half distracted, she rushed through the town to communicate the dreadful intelligence. A crowd collected, and a cry speedily arose to open the grave. Spades, pickaxes and mattocks were quickly put in requisition ; the divots were removed : the lid of the coffin was once more torn off ; and there lay its ghastly tenant, with his shoes replaced on his feet, and Rabbie's red night-cap clutched in his right hand !

The people, in consternation, fled from the churchyard ; and nothing further has ever transpired to throw any additional light upon the melancholy fate of the Sutor of Selkirk.



D. KOSZTOLANYI

*The Honest Finder*



## THE HONEST FINDER

WHEN the Vienna boat appeared in the distance the bathers as a rule swam as far as the middle of the Danube, and when it passed they had a good time on the back of the waves.

Cornelius Esti, who spent the summer afternoons on the river, looked at the gay company around him with envy. He was a better swimmer than most of them, but since he was a writer, he had a much stronger imagination than any of them. Consequently, he was a coward.

One afternoon he made up his mind to swim across the river. It seemed child's play for his strong arms. He reached the middle in a flash and there he stopped and began to reflect about himself. Just reflecting. He did not gasp for air, he did not pant, he was not tired, his heart did not beat too fast. He could have swum a good deal further, he could have easily swum across the Danube, but suddenly the idea came to his mind that he was *not* afraid, and from this very idea he became so frightened that now he was almost trembling in the water.

He turned back, but the bank he started from seemed farther away than the opposite bank, so he changed direction. But that way the water seemed unfamiliar : it felt dark, deep and cold. He suddenly felt a cramp in his left foot. When he kicked out with his right foot he felt the same feeling, only this time it was painful. He tried to swim on his back as he usually did when he felt a cramp, but that was no good

now either. He tossed about for a minute or two, then rolled round, went under water and gulped some of it. Then he reappeared and now enveloped in the dark veils of the water he slowly sank downwards. His hands beat the water and the air desperately.

His struggle was seen, however, on the bank. There was a cry that someone was drowning in the Danube.

A young man in a blue bathing dress had already dived from the corridor of the boathouse and raced swiftly towards the drowning Esti. He arrived in time.

Esti's head had just reappeared for a second. The life-saver gripped his long hair and dragged him to the bank, where he soon regained consciousness.

When Esti opened his eyes he saw the sky first, then the sand, then he saw people standing in the sun round him with their bodies glittering like silver. An elderly man in a bathing dress who wore black glasses knelt by his side and held his wrist. He was obviously a doctor.

Now the little crowd which surrounded him looked at the young man in the blue bathing dress with interest and curiosity. The one who—as he was told—had just dragged him out of death's throes among the excitement and cheers of the bank.

Since he was a polite Hungarian, the young man walked up to Esti, stretched out his hand and said :

“My name is Ellinger.”

“My name is Esti,” said Esti, and sat up.

“Oh, Mr. Esti,” stammered the young man shyly, “I know you very well. Everybody does.”

Esti tried to behave like a celebrity as far as circumstances permitted.

He was in a great embarrassment. In the course of his life he was given many presents, but none of them were really unexpected. As a child he received a beautiful stamp-album.

When he was confirmed his uncle gave him a ring with his monogram engraved, and on his twenty-first birthday his father gave him a gold watch.

Later on he received a few academic honours, two literary prizes and a dozen flattering notices on the books he published. Yet never in his life had he received quite so big a present and never from one single man.

Yes, it was his life this young man had returned to him. After all, had he not come to bathe this afternoon, or had he lighted a cigarette the moment the accident happened, instead of plunging into the Danube, Cornelius Esti would by now be somewhere in the bottom of the river . . . among the fishes . . . in a totally unknown place. Yes, he was born fresh now. He was born for the second time. At the age of thirty-five.

He got up and grabbed the young man's hand, and stammered :

"My friend . . . my friend . . . thank you. . . ."

"Oh, Mr. Esti——"

"Thank you," he said again and immediately thought it a commonplace expression. It sounded as if he wanted to acknowledge a little favour such as someone giving him a light. He felt the inadequacy of words and tried to give emphasis and importance to them by the way he said it. Slowly and with warmth he repeated: "Thanks . . . thanks. . . ."

"Oh, nothing, Mr. Esti. Not really worth while. . . ."

"What does he mean?" Esti asked himself. "Isn't worth while? My life?"

Then he added quickly: "What you have done was really great, it was heroic, it was deeply human."

"You make me very happy," said the young man.

"And I really cannot find words," said Esti, and now he seized the other hand of the stranger and shook it like a storm.

"And now," said Esti a moment later, "it would be a good thing to make each other's proper acquaintance. Will you be free . . . let us see . . . to-night? No. Not to-night. To-morrow. Come and have coffee with me. Or wait . . . it would be better still . . . will you come to the Ritz Terrace and dine with me, say nine."

"I shall be honoured."

"Well, au revoir then."

"Au revoir."

Next evening, a few minutes after nine, he went to the "Ritz" and looked for Ellinger. There were many people on the terrace. Under huge electric fans he saw husbands who drank champagne-cup with other people's wives. Ellinger seemed nowhere.

At half-past nine he became restless and impatient. It would be such a pity to have missed the greatest benefactor of his life through some stupid misunderstanding. He felt an imperative need to talk to him. He spent the whole day thinking about him, and the things he would say to him. He signalled to a waiter and made inquiries.

When it came to describing him, he realised that he did not remember what Ellinger looked like.

Finally, as he looked round again, he saw someone, hidden by a decrepit palm-tree, sitting very modestly like the piano-tuner in the drawing-room. He went up to him.

"Are you Mr. Ellinger?"

"Oh, good evening, sir."

"So you *are* here. When did you arrive?"

"At half-past eight."

"Oh, I must apologise. But I mean, didn't you see me coming in?"

"I thought I might have disturbed you, maestro."

"Oh, come, come. You are really too modest, Mr. Ellinger. Will you sit in there. . . . ? The waiter will bring your things over."



Ellinger was about four inches shorter than Esti, and much thinner. His reddish hair was parted in the middle. He wore a white flannel suit and a belt. Esti looked into his face. So that was the man! The hero!

He watched him long and with great interest. After all, he was a novelist, never off duty, never having a private life, writing being a whole-time job.

Ellinger's low forehead suggested to Esti obvious signs of courage and determination. He felt real life in his new friend's company . . . life . . . real life that he had neglected for such a long time for letters.

It was chiefly Ellinger's modesty and great simplicity which appealed to him. (That magnificent primitiveness of his.) Esti had never been "primitive" in his life—he seemed always to be a complicated individual, even in the cradle.

Now he said: "Let's eat something. I am very hungry. I hope you are, too?"

"No. I had just finished tea, thank you."

"What a pity," said Esti, then ordered a few choice items for Ellinger, who sat in front of him, blushing as if he were responsible for something very shameful.

Now he put his hand on Ellinger's arm and said with warm interest in his voice:

"And now tell me about yourself. . . . What do you do for a living?"

"I am a clerk."

"Where?"

"At the 'First Hungarian Oil.'"

"Are you married?"

"No."

"Good," laughed Esti. A little too deliberately.

"My life," said Ellinger suddenly, and with a hint of mystery, "is a real tragedy. He paused for a moment then kept showing his gold tooth. "I lost my father when I was

quite young. I was just three. My poor widowed mother was left with five children. She had to keep us with her hard work."

"This is 'raw material,'" thought Esti, "and as such it isn't interesting. The only things that are artistically interesting are those which have *form* as well."

"I must not complain," continued Ellinger, "because now all of us have settled down. My sisters are married and I have my job. Not a very good one, but still. In these days. . . ."

Ellinger ate with appetite. After having exhausted his life-story as a subject, he could say nothing further. From time to time Esti, with an occasional question, tried to give a stimulating injection to the conversation which was drying up. He asked Ellinger where he learned to swim so well. Ellinger answered in a few words as if filling in an official questionnaire, then he sank into shy silence again.

When they finished the bottle of champagne, Esti said: "I shall be always at your service. I mean any time you should need it and any time I can be of assistance to you. I never can forget what you have done to me. I shall be grateful all through my life."

When the bill was brought Ellinger made a movement towards his pocket. Esti objected and paid the bill. He asked Ellinger to look him up and gave him his telephone number, whereupon Ellinger told him the number of the "First Hungarian Oil."

"Why did I write that down," Esti asked himself as he walked home. "But all the same, when there is another opportunity for him to save my life, I might give him a ring."

The piece of paper with the number on had littered his writing-desk for a long time. He did not ring Ellinger and

Ellinger never rang him. He heard nothing of him for six months.

It was just before Christmas. It was very cold and Esti could reasonably think of anything but bathing or, for that matter, drowning in the Danube. It was Sunday and half-past twelve. He was to go out to lunch at one. It was then that Ellinger was announced to him.

"That's grand, Ellinger," he shouted, "I'm glad to see you at last. Well, what news?"

"I am all right, thanks," said Ellinger, "only my mother is ill. She was sent into hospital last week with a stroke . . . I . . . I shall be really grateful if . . . for the time being you could lend me . . ."

"How much do you want?"

"Two hundred pengös."

"I haven't got it now," said Esti, "but I can give you a hundred and fifty now and send the rest to your address. Will that do?"

He sent fifty pengös to him the same day. He knew it was a "deferred moral obligation" which he had to satisfy. After all it was his life for which he had to thank Ellinger. And that was worth two hundred!

During the illness of his mother, Ellinger was given some more money. In small sums another two hundred, and when the mother died he sent him three hundred and fifty, which this time he had to borrow himself.

After that Ellinger saw him fairly often. On various pretences he went on borrowing little sums from him. Sometimes he asked for twenty, sometimes only for five pengös. Esti had handed over the money with a certain gusto, and when Ellinger left the house he felt a certain relief. He felt he could not suffer Ellinger's presence. His gold tooth and his commonplace words.

One day he woke up to reality. "He is the greatest fool

on earth," he exclaimed, "for nobody but an idiot would come to save my life. Why didn't he leave me in the river?"

One evening—it was very late—when Esti came home he found Ellinger in his study. He told his news gaily:

"Oh, Esti. Just imagine. . . . I was given the sack, without any notice. Now I have nowhere to live. I thought I might come to live with you for the time being. D'you mind?"

"Of course not," answered Esti and handed him a new nightshirt. "You could sleep on the sofa."

Next morning he tried to discuss the situation with Ellinger.

"I don't know what I am going to do," said the young man. "You see, it was a miserable little job. I had to work the whole day for a dirty hundred and twenty. Miserable it was. . . ."

"Well, you have to look for a better job now."

Ellinger had been after a job for a few days and always came home depressed: "There's no opening you see."

"You must not lose your courage," Esti kept comforting him. "You can stay with me till you find a job and I'll give you a little pocket money."

Ellinger turned out to be a modest, quiet person. He went with Esti to his club for the meals and sometimes when his friend did not want to take someone else, he accompanied him to first nights. Apart from this he lay all the afternoon on the sofa. He seemed enervated. His last stroke of energy was obviously exhausted when he saved Esti's life.

There was only one thing insufferable about Ellinger.

When in the evening Esti sat at his desk with torment, fright, care, delight and misgivings, pulling faces all the time, and began to write with a wetting forehead, Ellinger placed himself in front of him and gazed at him with unrepressed curiosity as if his host were a curious animal in a cage.

"Ellinger!" shouted Esti, dropping his fountain-pen in a temper, "I like you very much, but don't for God's sake keep looking at me while I write. I write with my nerves. Will you . . . honour the next room with your presence?"

The two had been living together for some time after that, without anything to disturb their relations. Ellinger found it very natural to live in Esti's house, and in his spare time—an unending one—he read a theatrical magazine with intense interest.

One evening he put a film-magazine under Esti's nose, on the cover of which there was a film-star. He laughed: "Well, this one knows the business all right. . . ."

"What?" asked Esti severely.

"I mean she knows one thing and another," said Ellinger gaily, and winked at him with a hint of frivolity.

Esti lost his temper and ran into his study. "Well, that's the limit," he said to himself. "I can see that he saved my life, but the question is whether he saved it for me or for himself. If he saved it for himself, then I can hand it back to him, and he should do with it anything he likes. After all, according to law, the honest finder can keep only something like ten per cent of the value of the article found. I dare say I have paid that ten per cent with its interest a hundred times to him, in money, time and nervous energy. I don't owe him anything."

He went up to Ellinger and tried to be severe: "Look here, Ellinger. This sort of thing cannot go on. I can't help you any more. You must stand on your feet. I can support you a little, but nobody could help you but yourself. Buck up, Ellinger. Cheer up, Ellinger! Up with the head, Ellinger!"

But Ellinger only lowered his head like a flower after

rain, and in his eyes there was reproach, great and silent reproach, as in the eyes of a deer in captivity. Then he went on lying on the sofa, reading the theatrical magazine, continuing to accompany Esti to all theatrical events. He went as a critic. He was so well known at the managers' offices that they had put him on their register and sent him tickets to first nights as if he were a social celebrity or a gossip writer. And time flew.

One evening, late in December, the two men were coming home on the embankment in the Buda side. Ellinger seemed to be very much interested in the private life of actresses : he wanted to know the age of one prima donna who had been divorced late and had lovers. Esti, reticent and æsthetic Esti, who was plunged into fits by questions like these, answered him humiliated.

Ellinger suddenly said : "I say, Esti, I have written a poem."

"Have you really?"

"Yes, shall I recite it?"

"Do," said Esti, with almost unbearable resignation.

"My life," began Ellinger and remained silent for a second or two to make Esti feel that this was the title. "That's the title, what do you think of it? Good, isn't it?"

Then he recited his poem slowly and with emphasis. The poem was incredibly bad and very, very long.

Esti dropped his head. It came to his mind that he had sunk very deep, and that he was fast approaching a bad end. Why was it that he had to tolerate this horrible individual? Why? Why? What had he to do with his life? What?

He looked at the Danube. Among its steep banks the river was covered with drifting ice floes. "If I pushed him in?" he reflected. But his reflection was short, and the next moment he had thrown him in already.

He took to his heels.

AGATHA CHRISTIE

*The Veiled Lady*





## THE VEILED LADY

I HAD noticed that for some time Poirot had been growing increasingly dissatisfied and restless. We had had no interesting cases of late, nothing on which my little friend could exercise his keen wits and remarkable powers of deduction. This morning he flung down the newspaper with an impatient "Tchah!"—a favourite exclamation of his which sounded exactly like a cat sneezing.

"They fear me, Hastings ; the criminals of your England they fear me ! When the cat is there the little mice, they come no more to the cheese !"

"I don't suppose the greater part of them even know of your existence," I said laughing.

Poirot looked at me reproachfully. He always imagines that the whole world is thinking of Hercule Poirot. He had certainly made a name for himself in London, but I could hardly believe that his existence struck terror into the criminal world.

"What about the daylight robbery of jewels in Bond Street the other day ?" I asked.

"A neat *coup*," said Poirot approvingly, "though not in my line. *Pas de finesse, seulement de l'audace !* A man with a loaded cane smashes the plate-glass window of a jeweller's shop and grabs a number of precious stones.

"Worthy citizens immediately seize him ; a policeman arrives. He is caught red-handed with the jewels on him. He is marched off to the police station, and then it is discovered

that the stones are paste. He has passed the real ones to a confederate—one of the aforementioned worthy citizens. He will go to prison—true; but when he comes out there will be a nice little fortune awaiting him. Yes, not badly imagined. But I could do better than that. Sometimes, Hastings, I regret that I am of such a moral disposition. To work against the law, it would be a pleasing change.”

“Cheer up, Poirot, you know you are unique in your own line.”

“But what is there on hand in my own line?”

I picked up the paper. “Here’s an Englishman mysteriously done to death in Holland,” I said.

“They always say that—and later they find that they ate tinned fish and that his death is perfectly natural.”

“Well, if you’re determined to grouse!”

“*Tiens!*” said Poirot, who had strolled across to the window. “Here in the street is what they call in novels a ‘heavily veiled lady.’ She mounts the steps; she rings the bell—she comes to consult us. Here is a possibility of something interesting. When one is as young and pretty as that one, one does not veil the face except for a big affair.”

A minute later our visitor was ushered in. As Poirot had said, she was indeed heavily veiled. It was impossible to distinguish her features until she raised her veil of black Spanish lace. Then I saw that Poirot’s intuition had been right; the lady was extremely pretty, with fair hair and large blue eyes. From the costly simplicity of her attire I deduced at once that she belonged to the upper strata of society.

“Monsieur Poirot,” said the lady in a soft, musical voice, “I am in great trouble. I can hardly believe that you can help me, but I have heard such wonderful things of you that I come, literally as a last hope, to beg you to do the impossible.”

“The impossible, it pleases me always,” said Poirot. “Continue, I beg of you, mademoiselle.”

Our guest hesitated.

"But you must be frank," added Poirot. "You must not leave me in the dark on any point."

"I will trust you," said the girl suddenly. "You have heard of Lady Millicent Castle Vaughan?"

I looked up with keen interest. The announcement of Lady Millicent's engagement to the young Duke of Southshire had appeared a few days previously. She was, I knew, the fifth daughter of an impecunious Irish peer, and the Duke of Southshire was one of the best matches in England.

"I am Lady Millicent," continued the girl. "You may have read of my engagement. I should be one of the happiest girls alive; but, alas, Monsieur Poirot, I am in a terrible trouble! There is a man, a horrible man—his name is Lavington; and he—I hardly know how to tell you. There was a letter I wrote—I was only sixteen at the time; and he—he——"

"A letter that you wrote to this Mr. Lavington?"

"Oh, no—not to him! To a young soldier—I was very fond of him—he was killed in the War."

"I understand," said Poirot kindly.

"It was a foolish letter, an indiscreet letter, but, indeed, Monsieur Poirot, nothing more. But there are phrases in it which—which might bear a different interpretation."

"I see," said Poirot. "And this letter has come into the possession of Mr. Lavington?"

"Yes, and he threatens, unless I pay an enormous sum of money, a sum that it is quite impossible for me to raise, to send it to the Duke."

"The dirty swine!" I ejaculated. "I beg your pardon, Lady Millicent."

"Would it not be wiser to confess all to your future husband?"

"I dare not, Monsieur Poirot. The Duke is a rather peculiar character, jealous and suspicious and prone to believe

the worst. I might as well break off my engagement at once."

"Dear, dear," said Poirot, with an expressive grimace. "And what do you want me to do, milady?"

"I thought perhaps that I might ask Mr. Lavington to call upon you. I would tell him that you were empowered by me to discuss the matter. Perhaps you could reduce his demands."

"What sum does he mention?"

"Twenty thousand pounds—an impossibility. I doubt if I could raise a thousand, even."

"You might perhaps borrow the money on the prospect of your approaching marriage—but I doubt if you could get hold of half that sum. Besides—eh bien, it is repugnant to me that you should pay! No, the ingenuity of Hercule Poirot shall defeat your enemies! Send me this Mr. Lavington. Is he likely to bring the letter with him?"

The girl shook her head.

"I do not think so. He is very cautious."

"I suppose there is no doubt that he really has it?"

"He showed it to me when I went to his house."

"You went to his house? That was very imprudent, milady."

"Was it? I was so desperate. I hoped my entreaties might move him."

"Oh, la la! The Lavingtons of this world are not moved by entreaties! He would welcome them as showing how much importance you attached to the document. Where does he live, this fine gentleman?"

"At Buona Vista, Wimbledon. I went there after dark."

Poirot groaned.

"I declared that I would inform the police in the end," she continued, "but he only laughed in a horrid, sneering manner. 'By all means, my dear Lady Millicent, do so if you wish,' he said."

"Yes, it is hardly an affair for the police," murmured Poirot.

"'But I think you will be wiser than that,' he continued. 'See, here is your letter—in this little Chinese puzzle box!' He held it so that I could see. I tried to snatch at it, but he was too quick for me. With a horrid smile he folded it up and replaced it in the little wooden box. 'It will be quite safe here, I assure you,' he said; 'and the box itself lives in such a clever place that you would never find it.' My eyes turned to the small wall-safe, and he shook his head and laughed. 'I have a better safe than that,' he said. Oh, he was odious! Monsieur Poirot, do you think that you can help me?"

"Have faith in Papa Poirot. I will find a way."

These reassurances were all very well, I thought, as Poirot gallantly ushered his fair client down the stairs, but it seemed to me that we had a tough nut to crack. I said as much to Poirot when he returned. He nodded ruefully.

"Yes—the solution does not leap to the eye. He has the whip hand, this Monsieur Lavington. For the moment I do not see how we are to circumvent him."

Mr. Lavington called upon us that afternoon. Lady Millicent had spoken truly when she described him as an odious man. I felt a positive tingling in the end of my boot, so keen was I to kick him down the stairs. He was blustering and overbearing in manner, laughed Poirot's gentle suggestions to scorn, and generally showed himself as master of the situation. I could not help feeling that Poirot was hardly appearing at his best. He looked discouraged and crestfallen.

"Well, gentlemen," said Lavington as he took up his hat, "we don't seem to be getting much farther. The case stands like this: I'll let Lady Millicent off cheap, as she is a charming young lady," he leered odiously. "We'll say eighteen thousand, I'm off to Paris to-day—a little piece of business to

attend to over there. I shall be back on Tuesday. Unless the money is paid by Tuesday evening the letter goes to the Duke. Don't tell me Lady Millicent can't raise the money. Some of her gentlemen friends would be only too willing to oblige such a pretty woman with a loan—if she goes the right way about it."

My face flushed, and I took a step forward, but Lavington had wheeled out of the room as he finished the sentence.

"My God!" I cried. "Something has got to be done. You seem to be taking this lying down, Poirot."

"You have an excellent heart, my friend—but your grey cells are in a deplorable condition. I have no wish to impress Mr. Lavington with my capabilities. The more pusillanimous he thinks me the better."

"Why?"

"It is curious," murmured Poirot reminiscently, "that I should have uttered a wish to work against the law just before Lady Millicent arrived!"

"You are going to burgle his house while he is away?" I gasped.

"Sometimes, Hastings, your mental processes are amazingly quick."

"Suppose he takes the letter with him?"

Poirot shook his head.

"That is very unlikely. He has evidently a hiding-place in his house that he fancies to be pretty impregnable."

"When do we—er—do the deed?"

"To-morrow night. We will start from here about eleven o'clock."

At the time appointed I was ready to set off. I had donned a dark suit and a soft dark hat. Poirot beamed kindly on me.

"You have dressed the part, I see," he observed. "Come, let us take the Underground to Wimbledon."

"Aren't we going to take anything with us? Tools to break in with?"

"My dear Hastings, Hercule Poirot does not adopt such crude methods."

I retired, snubbed, but my curiosity was alert.

It was just on midnight that we entered the small suburban garden of Buona Vista. The house was dark and silent. Poirot went straight to a window at the back of the house, raised the sash noiselessly, and bade me enter.

"How did you know this window would be open?" I whispered, for really it seemed uncanny.

"Because I sawed through the catch this morning."

"What?"

"But yes, it was the most simple. I called, presented a fictitious card and one of Inspector Japp's official ones. I said I had been sent, recommended by Scotland Yard, to attend to some burglar-proof fastenings that Mr. Lavington wanted fixed while he was away. The housekeeper welcomed me with enthusiasm. It seems they have had two attempted burglaries here lately—evidently our little idea has occurred to other clients of Mr. Lavington's—with nothing of value taken. I examined all the windows, made my little arrangement, forbade the servants to touch the windows until to-morrow, as they were electrically connected up, and withdrew gracefully."

"Really, Poirot, you are wonderful."

"*Mon ami*, it was one of the simplest. Now to work! The servants sleep at the top of the house, so we will run little risk of disturbing them."

"I presume the safe is built into the wall somewhere?"

"Safe? Fiddlesticks! There is no safe. Mr. Lavington is an intelligent man. You will see he will have devised a hiding-place much more intelligent than a safe. A safe is the first thing every one looks for."

Whereupon we began a systematic search of the entire place. But after several hours' ransacking of the house our search had been unavailing. I saw symptoms of anger gathering on Poirot's face.

"*Ah, sapristi*, is Hercule Poirot to be beaten? Never! Let us be calm. Let us reflect. Let us reason. Let us—*enfin*—employ our little grey cells!"

He paused for some moments, bending his brows in concentration; then the green light I knew so well stole into his eyes.

"I have been an imbecile! The kitchen!"

"The kitchen!" I cried. "But that's impossible. The servants!"

"Exactly! Just what ninety-nine people out of a hundred would say! And for that very reason the kitchen is the ideal place to choose. It is full of various homely objects. *En avant*, to the kitchen!"

I followed him, completely sceptical, and watched while he dived into bread-bins, tapped saucepans, and put his head into the gas-oven. In the end, tired of watching him, I strolled back to the study. I was convinced that there, and there only, would we find the *cache*. I made a further minute search, noted that it was now a quarter-past four and that therefore it would soon be growing light, and then went back to the kitchen regions.

To my utter amazement, Poirot was standing right inside the coal-bin, to the utter ruin of his neat light suit. He made a grimace.

"But yes, my friend, it is against all my instincts so to ruin my appearance, but what will you?"

"But Lavington can't have buried it under the coal?"

"If you would use your eyes you would see that it is not coal that I examine."

I then saw that on a shelf behind the coal bunker some logs



of wood were piled. Poirot was dexterously taking them down one by one. Suddenly he uttered a low exclamation. "Your knife, Hastings!"

I handed it to him. He appeared to insert it in the wood, and suddenly the log split in two. It had been neatly sawn in half and a cavity hollowed out in the centre. From this cavity Poirot took a little wooden box of Chinese make.

"Well done!" I cried, carried out of myself.

"Gently, Hastings! Do not raise your voice too much. Come, let us be off, before the daylight is upon us."

Slipping the box into his pocket, he leaped lightly out of the coal-bunker and brushed himself down as well as he could. Leaving the house by the same way as we had come, we walked rapidly in the direction of London.

"But what an extraordinary place!" I expostulated. "Any-one might have used the log."

"In July, Hastings? And it was at the bottom of the pile—a very ingenious hiding-place. Ah, here is a taxi! Now for home, a wash and a refreshing sleep."

After the excitement of the night I slept late. When I finally strolled into our sitting-room just before one o'clock I was surprised to see Poirot leaning back in an arm-chair, the Chinese box open beside him, calmly reading the letter he had taken from it.

He smiled at me affectionately, and tapped the sheet he held. "She was right, the Lady Millicent, never would the Duke have pardoned this letter! It contains some of the most extravagant terms of affection I have come across."

"Really, Poirot," I said, rather disgustedly, "I don't think you should have read the letter. That's the sort of thing that isn't done."

"It is done by Hercule Poirot," replied my friend imperturbably.

"And another thing," I said. "I don't think using Japp's official card yesterday was quite playing the game."

"But I was not playing a game, Hastings. I was conducting a case."

I shrugged my shoulders. One can't argue with a point of view.

"A step on the stairs," said Poirot. "That will be Lady Millicent."

Our fair client came in with an anxious expression on her face which changed to one of delight on seeing the letter and box which Poirot held up.

"Oh, Monsieur Poirot ! How wonderful of you ! How did you do it ?"

"By rather reprehensible methods, milady. But Mr. Lavington will not prosecute. This is your letter, is it not ?"

She glanced through it.

"Yes. Oh, how can I ever thank you ? You are a wonderful, wonderful man ! Where was it hidden ?"

Poirot told her.

"How very clever of you !" She took up the small box from the table. "I shall keep this as a souvenir."

"I had hoped, milady, that you would permit me to keep it—also as a souvenir."

"I hope to send you a better souvenir than that—on my wedding-day. You shall not find me ungrateful, Monsieur Poirot."

"The pleasure of doing you a service will be more to me than a cheque—so you permit that I retain the box ?"

"Oh, no, Monsieur Poirot, I simply must have that," she cried laughingly.

She stretched out her hand, but Poirot was before her. His hand closed over it.

"I think not." His voice had changed.

"What do you mean?" Her voice seemed to have grown sharper.

"At any rate, permit me to abstract its further contents. You observe that the original cavity has been reduced by half. In the top half the compromising letter; in the bottom——"

He made a nimble gesture, then held out his hand. On the palm were four large glittering stones, and two big milky-white pearls.

"The jewels stolen in Bond Street the other day, I rather fancy," murmured Poirot. "Japp will tell us."

To my utter amazement Japp himself stepped out from Poirot's bedroom.

"An old friend of yours, I believe," said Poirot politely to Lady Millicent.

"Nabbed, by the Lord!" said Lady Millicent, with a complete change of manner. "You nippy old devil!" She looked at Poirot with almost affectionate awe.

"Well, Gertie, my dear," said Japp, "the game's up this time, I fancy. Fancy seeing you again so soon! We've got your pal, too, the gentleman who came here the other day calling himself Lavington. As for Lavington himself, *alias* Croker, *alias* Reed, I wonder which of the gang it was who stuck a knife into him the other day in Holland? Thought he'd got the goods with him, didn't you? And he hadn't. He double-crossed you properly—hid 'em in his own house. You had two fellows looking for them and then you tackled Monsieur Poirot here, and by a piece of amazing luck he found them."

"You do like talking, don't you?" said the late Lady Millicent. "Easy there, now, I'll go quietly. You can't say that I'm not the perfect lady. Ta-ta all!"

"The shoes were wrong," said Poirot dreamily, while I was still too stupefied to speak. "I have made my little observations of your English nation, and a lady, a born lady, is always

particular about her shoes. She may have shabby clothes, but she will be well shod. Now this Lady Millicent had smart, expensive clothes and cheap shoes. It was not likely that either you or I should have seen the real Lady Millicent, she has been very little in London, and this girl had a certain superficial resemblance which would pass well enough. As I say, the shoes first awakened my suspicions, and then her story—and her veil—were a little melodramatic, eh? The Chinese box with a bogus compromising letter in the top must have been known to all the gang, but the log of wood was the late Mr. Lavington's own idea. *Eh! par exemple!* Hastings, I hope you will not again wound my feelings as you did yesterday by saying that I am unknown to the criminal classes *Ma foi*, they even employ me when they themselves fail!"

FRANCIS STUART

*Love or Money*



## LOVE OR MONEY

OLD Mr. Booker was an incurable romantic. He made his fortune in munitions during the war. Up to the time of his comparatively sudden rise to wealth he and his wife had had a happy and devoted life in a small suburban house with their one son, Johnny. But being rich went to Mrs. Booker's head.

When they moved to Mayfair, happiness for Mr. Booker was over. He hardly ever saw his wife. She came home in the early hours and sometimes not at all. Finally, being able no longer to shut his tired eyes to what was going on, he took a dose of poison in the ornate room that was supposed to be theirs, but which she had never shared with him. He left most of his money to Johnny, who was at that time twenty-two.

In the long and curious will there was a statement to the effect that he would not rest in his grave until his money, that had so far brought only disaster to a pair of once happy lovers, was the direct instrument of reversing this process.

His wife contested the will on the score of insanity. There being no definite evidence of any such thing, however, she lost the case. But she had been sufficiently provided for, and, as long as Johnny lived with her, things could go on much as before.

Not quite as before, though. There was one unpleasant aspect of the whole business. As though carrying out the threat in his will, Mr. Booker haunted the house.

The old man's thin voice could often be heard by his

widow and son bewailing, they supposed (though no words were ever distinct), the curse of money which had deprived him of love. Furniture seemed to be moved above their heads, doors banged in the night.

They moved into another house. It was no use. It appeared that they were haunted rather than it. They had the walls, cellars and attics examined. It was no use. At last Mrs. Booker began to think that it might be worth trying to lay the ghost by having the wish he had expressed, or half-expressed, in his will carried out. But how this was to be done she did not know.

If John would fall in love and marry a nice girl, and if they were happy together living on the old man's money, if only really happy even for a day, she thought it would be enough. Her late husband would rest in peace.

She put this plan before John. He, however, did not take to it at all. He was a somewhat dissipated young man who lived only for gambling, drinking and affairs.

Such was the state of things one summer afternoon when he found himself stranded in a small country village, his large car having inexplicably broken down on the way back from the Newmarket meeting. While his chauffeur examined the car, he strolled into the village inn.

The landlord hurried after his obviously wealthy customer into the room behind the bar.

"A double brandy," young Booker ordered, glancing round him with some dissatisfaction.

Joan, aged twenty, begged her father to be allowed to bring in the distinguished customer's drink herself. When she came into the parlour John Booker noticed her at once. It had never struck him how attractive a girl could be without any make-up. She was so young, too. Young and innocent. Yes, decidedly she attracted him.



But here, he knew, his usual methods would scarcely be in place. Still, he was not for one moment at a loss.

Two days later he met Joan, as arranged, a mile on the London side of the little village where her father kept the inn. She was dressed simply in a print summer frock and she carried her hat in her hand. Young Booker could hardly hide his joy at the sight. This he thought it better to do, to some extent, in case of prematurely alarming her.

"Ah, how charming you look, my dear," was all he permitted himself to say.

Her extreme appearance of youth and innocence somewhat embarrassed him, however. Not from any motive of remorse, but merely from the knowledge of the contrast they would present if he took her to a restaurant or other public place. He was quite aware of the lines of dissipation on his own face and the sensual curve of his mouth, which his black moustache did little to hide. He took her to lunch in a quiet but expensive little restaurant.

After lunch he took her to do a little shopping. Whatever faults John might have he never spared expense to gain his objective.

At the jeweller's shop in Bond Street he told her to choose herself a ring. This she did at once without demur, surprising him by the shrewdness of her judgment. She picked out a ring set with a large single diamond. The price, even to young Booker's extravagant standards, was something of a shocker. But he paid with a smile. When they got back into the large car he put his arm around her. She drew away.

"Shall we go home, my darling?" he whispered to her.

"Could we go to the races, do you think?" she asked.

"Of course, of course. I didn't know they would amuse you," he agreed at once. "To Sandhurst Park, Jimmy," he said to the chauffeur.

"What shall I back for you, sweetheart?" John asked her before the first race.

"Imara, please," she answered at once, without hesitation. He put one hundred pounds on Imara for her at six to one. Joan watched the race through his glasses which he lent her. She put down the glasses while the horses were still a furlong from the post, with Imara actually in the lead.

"He's beaten," she said. "Doesn't quite stay the last furlong." And, right enough, two other horses passed him close to the post. John was astonished at her acumen.

"Surely you've been to races before, my sweet?" he asked her. She shook her head.

"Where would I get money for things like that?" she answered, with a little smile that he thought most lovely. "But I've often walked over to Newmarket in the early morning to watch the gallops. It's only five or six miles from Dad's pub."

"The deuce you have!" young Booker thought, more and more astonished, and at the same time delighted, at the turn things were taking. She seemed to have all that he craved for and never hoped to find in one woman. Innocence and intelligence, sophistication and a naïve charm.

For the third race she picked a horse called Night of Love, and, because of the animal's name, young Booker could not resist putting on two hundred pounds for her at fives. This selection cantered home an easy winner by several lengths. Joan remained as cool as ever. And when he handed her the thousand pounds, all in one-hundred-pound notes, she smiled at him, put them in her little bag, and said: "I shall have to go home now."

When she left him that night a few yards outside the little village in which her father kept the inn he wrung a promise from her to meet him again the next morning but one.

Joan, on reaching her father's inn and finding him busy

behind the bar, merely whispered to him: "It's money for jam," and having asked him to send a double brandy up after her, ran lightly up the narrow staircase to her room. There she sat down on the bed with her parcels beside her. She got out a little notebook from a drawer and made the following entries under the day and month.

By cash . . . . .	£1000
One diamond ring, say . . .	£1200
Various articles of clothing, etc., say	£110
	<hr/>
Total . . . . .	£2310
	<hr/>

So the summer and autumn passed. John did not tire of her, for every time he picked her up outside the little village where her father kept the inn it seemed as though it was the first. She always kept just beyond his reach.

But a shadow lurked beneath those happy days. To begin with, the already diminished Booker fortune was being quickly undermined, and secondly, the hauntings had become such that even young Booker could no longer remain immune from them.

It seemed that the ghost was being driven to a frenzy by the knowledge that, with the diminishing of his erstwhile fortune, the chances of the money being used in the way which alone would set him at peace was becoming remote. And yet the irony of it was that the sleepless nights and nerve-racking experiences to which he subjected his reprobate son had the effect of driving him to seek consolation in the company of the country-girl. Thus a vicious circle was established that ended only when the young man had completely beggared himself.

That happened early the following spring, and with an apparent suddenness that completely knocked him over. A cheque that he had sent to a jeweller's in settlement of an

account for the girl's latest present was returned by the bank unpaid. At the same time it appeared that her father had discovered the whole "intrigue," as she called it, and by his watchfulness put an end to her ever meeting young Booker again.

Within a few weeks Joan had a racing stable of her own. This she entrusted to a former jockey, a little man called Joe.

At first she met with considerable success, and on Joe's advice invested more and more money in horses. She still lived at her father's inn, to which Joe drove over from Newmarket most evenings to see her.

She had several visits from John's mother. The object of these was to try to persuade the girl to use the Booker fortune to make a home for herself and some young man with whom she was in love. For poor Mrs. Booker, now almost penniless, was nevertheless still suffering as much as ever from the ghost, who made it evident to her that it was still possible to give him, and therefore her, peace in this way alone.

Her visits, however, did little to reassure her. She met Joe, and this romance left no doubt at all in her mind that it was not one likely to achieve her purpose. It seemed, indeed, even less idyllic than the one that Joan had embarked on with her son. The ex-jockey was obviously, as she saw at a glance, a crook of the meanest description. She tried on each occasion to open Joan's eyes to this fact, but she seemed as completely captivated by him as young Booker had been by her.

"Don't you see he's after the money and nothing else?" she told the girl on her last visit.

But the girl, with the simplicity that had so endeared her to John, answered: "How can you say such things about him? He slaves for me day and night with those horses and won't take a penny above his actual fee even when he wins races for me."

After a bit things did not go so well for her. Her horses failed to win, and when Joe advised her to sell some of those that before had been so promising, the prices that she received for them were unaccountably low. Mrs. Booker, who still kept in touch with the girl for her own purposes, saw that the Booker fortune was again changing hands. This time it was flowing into the account of the ex-jockey.

And certainly this knowledge gave her very little cause for hope. The woman had undergone a remarkable change in the last few years. Apart from the haunted look that she always, naturally enough, now wore, there was a deeper change. Because her own longed-for peace was associated with idyllic love she had come to look upon love quite differently. She now believed in pure romance with a pitiful and passionate intensity.

So that when she saw it was time to transfer her attention from the girl to Joe she pleaded with him on behalf of this ideal with surprising eloquence. All this was lost on the ex-jockey.

"I'm afraid I can't oblige you, Missus," he said. "I was never much of a one for girls."

"Is there no one, no one for whom you feel a tenderness, a shy admiration, even a trace of romantic longing?" she asked hopelessly.

But the coarse fellow got rid of her without much ceremony. She saw that she would have to try another method. And this, with a certain cunning born of her passionate belief in what she had by now come to look on as a "cause," she was not long in hitting on.

She quickly saw that the only point that the fellow could be touched on, apart from money, was his snobbishness. He was anxious that his newly acquired wealth should also benefit him in the social sphere. She suggested to him the possibility of using some of it to procure himself a knighthood.

She mentioned certain well-known names, exaggerated her own influence. The ex-jockey was immediately interested.

"If I'd some sort of guarantee, Missus," he said.

"It's a gamble," she told him, cunningly, "that I admit. But to a gambler like you that should be no deterrent. The odds are in your favour and the prize is surely attractive."

"It's attractive all right," he admitted. "Sir Joseph, eh?" he muttered.

"A donation to a hospital, is that the ticket?" he asked her, after a moment.

"No, no," she said at once, "that's been overdone. No one even notices such things these days, unless, of course, it is a really huge sum, and I don't suppose you are prepared——"

He interrupted her. "Quite right there, Missus. As low as possible, not a penny above the rock-bottom rates for this artist."

"I have thought of that," she went on, "and I have made some discreet inquiries in certain quarters."

"Good, good," he muttered, impressed by these hints.

"I understand your native town is an industrial one in the north?" she went on.

"You bet it is. Dear old Wadford. And proud of it," he told her.

"Very well. What you've got to do is to buy up some waste land as centrally situated as possible and turn it into a public park."

"A park, eh? That's the racket, is it? And who the hell wants a park, I should like to know?"

"It's not a question of who wants it, it's a question of policy. There are certain people of considerable influence deeply interested in the welfare of Wadford. If they heard that you had endowed the town with a park they would be very favourably impressed."

She was convinced that in an industrial centre like Wadford

a park would be of the greatest advantage to couples who wished to meet in some secluded spot. And amongst all these there would, she calculated, be bound to be at least a few whose love was of the idyllic, romantic sort which would satisfy the ghost that his wish had at last been fulfilled.

It was not difficult to convince the ex-jockey of the astuteness of this plan. In some ways, as she saw, he was an amazingly simple and even credulous fellow. And by the following summer the new park in Wadford had been opened to the public. She herself saved up for months before the ceremony in order to be able to go to the town and stay there in a cheap hotel to watch the fruition of her plans.

Unfortunately, however, the ghost had the same notion.

From the very first evening his impatience was such that he could not keep away from what was to have been the scene of his release from torment and tormenting. He glided about the newly planted shrubs and bushes, peering with a pitiful eagerness into the darkest corners where the young grass had scarcely yet had time to sprout thinly.

Couples started out of their very first tentative embrace at a low muttering or a fleeting pale shadow, or at the feel of cold breath on the back of their necks. The park soon got the name of being haunted, and, although always full of children in the daytime, by dusk was deserted.

The old ghost, now disappointed beyond endurance by the crumbling of his new hopes, left the unlucky shrubberies and spent the time making the nights hideous in the small hotel where his widow still eked out her small savings. But finally she, too, realised that her plan had failed, and returned, haggard and ill, to London.

Very shortly after this young Booker, his health undermined by his earlier indulgences and now completely at the end of his tether, committed suicide in a garret. The news cannot be said to have upset his mother very greatly. Her

own existence was too much of a nightmare for any exterior happening to affect her very deeply. But suddenly and, to her inexplicably, within a week of John's death the hauntings ceased. She was beside herself with joy and relief.

She lived to a great old age, building in her imagination the most poetic pictures of how the Booker fortune, or at least part of it, had brought, in some mysterious and doubtless romantic fashion, happiness to some unknown but idealised lovers.

Actually the simple facts were these. Before killing himself young Booker had made sure of a sufficient supply of gas by putting no less than four shillings, the last actual coins of his once large fortune, in the meter.

After his death the garret was rented by a newly married couple very much in love with each other. The first night of their occupancy, which was also their first night together, they had no money at all. As they were both rather hungry, they hit on the expedient of forcing the gas-meter. From it they took all that it contained, the four shillings that young Booker had dropped into it. To the young couple it was a heaven-sent boon. And after a good meal, and even a glass of beer each, they started joyously on their honeymoon.



E. M. FORSTER

*Co-ordination*



## CO-ORDINATION

“DON’T thump,” said Miss Haddon. “And each run ought to be like a string of pearls. It is not. Why is it not?”

“Ellen, you beast, you’ve got my note.”

“No, I haven’t. You’ve got mine.”

“Well, whose note is it?”

Miss Haddon looked between their pigtails. “It is Mildred’s note,” she decided. “Go back to the double bars. And don’t thump.”

The girls went back, and again the little finger of Mildred’s right hand disputed for middle G with the little finger of Ellen’s left.

“It can’t be done,” they said. “It’s the man who wrote it’s fault.”

“It can easily be done if you don’t hold on so long, Ellen,” said Miss Haddon.

Four o’clock struck. Mildred and Ellen went, and Rose and Enid succeeded them. They played the duet worse than Mildred, but not as badly as Ellen. At four-fifteen Margaret and Jane came. They played worse than Rose and Enid, but not as badly as Ellen.

At four-thirty Dolores and Violet came. They played worse than Ellen. At four-forty-five Miss Haddon went to tea with the Principal, who explained why she desired all the pupils to learn the same duet. It was part of her new co-ordinative system.

The school was taking one subject for the year, only one—Napoleon—and all the studies were to bear on that one subject. Thus—not to mention French and History—the Repetition class was learning Wordsworth's political poems, the literature class was reading extracts from "War and Peace," the drawing class copied something of David's, the needlework class designed Empire gowns, and the music pupils—they, of course, were practising Beethoven's "Eroica" Symphony, which had been begun (though not finished) in honour of the Emperor.

Several of the other mistresses were at tea and they exclaimed that they loved co-ordinating, and that it was a lovely system: it made work so much more interesting to them as well as to the girls. But Miss Haddon did not respond. There had been no co-ordination in her day, and she could not understand it.

She only knew that she was growing old, and teaching music worse and worse, and she wondered how soon the Principal would find this out and dismiss her.

Meanwhile, high up in heaven Beethoven sat, and all around him, ranged on smaller clouds, sat his clerks. Each made entries in a ledger, and he whose ledger was entitled "'Eroica' Symphony: arranged for four hands, by Carl Müller" was making the following entries: "3.45, Mildred and Ellen: conductor, Miss Haddon. 4.0, Rose and Enid: conductor, Miss Haddon. 4.15, Margaret and Jane: conductor, Miss Haddon. 4.30——"

Beethoven interrupted. "Who is this Miss Haddon," he asked, "whose name recurs like the beat of a drum?"

"She has interpreted you for many years."

"And her orchestra?"

"They are maidens of the upper middle classes, who perform the 'Eroica' in her presence every day and all day. The

sound of it never ceases. It floats out of the window like a continual incense, and is heard up and down the street."

"Do they perform with insight?"

Since Beethoven is deaf, the clerk could reply: "With most intimate insight. There was a time when Ellen was further from your spirit than the rest, but that has not been the case since Dolores and Violet arrived."

"New comrades have inspired her. I understand."

The clerk was silent.

"I approve," continued Beethoven, "and in token of my approval I decree that Miss Haddon and her orchestra and all in their house shall this very evening hear a perfect performance of my A minor quartette."

\* \* \* \* \*

While the decree was being entered, and while the staff was wondering how it would be executed, a scene of even greater splendour was taking place in another part of the empyrean. There Napoleon sat, surrounded by his clerks, who were so numerous that the thrones of the outermost looked no larger than cirro-cumuli clouds.

They were busy entering all the references made on earth to their employer, a task for which he himself had organised them. Every few moments he asked: "And what is our latest phase?"

The clerk whose ledger was entitled "Homages de Wordsworth" answered: "50, Mildred, Ellen, Rose, Enid, Margaret and Jane, all recited the sonnet. 'Once did she hold the gorgeous East in fee.' Dolores and Violet attempted to recite it, but failed."

"The poet there celebrates my conquest of the Venetian Republic," said the Emperor, "and the greatness of the theme overcame Violet and Dolores. It is natural that they should fail. And the next phase?"

Another clerk said: "5.15, Mildred, Ellen, Rose, Enid, Margaret and Jane are sketching in the left front leg of Pauline Buonaparte's couch. Dolores and Violet are still learning their sonnet."

"It seems to me," said Napoleon, "that I have heard these charming names before."

"They are in my ledger, too," said a third clerk. "You may remember, sire, that about an hour ago they performed Beethoven's 'Eroica'——"

"Written in my honour," concluded the Emperor. "I approve."

"5.30," said a fourth clerk, "with the exception of Dolores and Violet, who have been sent to sharpen pencils, the whole company sings the 'Marseillaise.'"

"It needed but that," cried Napoleon, rising to his feet. "*Ces demoiselles ont un vrai élan vers la gloire.* I decree in recompense that they and all their house shall participate to-morrow morning in the victory of Austerlitz."

The decree was entered.

Evening prep. was at 7.30. The girls settled down gloomily, for they were already bored to tears by the new system. But a wonderful thing happened. A regiment of cavalry rode past the school, headed by the most spiffing band. The girls went off their heads with joy.

They rose from their seats, they sang, they advanced, they danced, they pranced, they made trumpets out of paper and used the blackboard as a kettle-drum. They were able to do this because Miss Haddon, who ought to have been supervising, had left the room to find a genealogical tree of Marie Louise; the history mistress had asked her particularly to take it to prep. for the girls to climb about in, but she had forgotten it.

"I am no good at all," thought Miss Haddon, as she stretched out her hand for the tree; it lay with some other

papers under a shell which the Principal had procured from St. Helena. "I am stupid and tired and old ; I wish that I was dead." Thus thinking, she lifted the shell mechanically to her ear ; her father, who was a sailor, had often done the same to her when she was young.

She heard the sea ; at first it was the tide whispering over the mud-flats or chattering against stones, or the short, crisp break of a wave on sand, or the long, echoing roar of a wave against rocks, or the sounds of the central ocean, where the waters pile themselves into mountains and part into ravines ; or when fog descends and the deep rises and falls gently, or when the air is so fresh that the big waves and the little waves that live in the big waves all sing for joy, and send one another kisses of white foam. She heard them all, but in the end she heard the sea itself, and knew that it was hers for ever.

"Miss Haddon !" said the Principal. "Miss Haddon ! How is it you are not supervising the girls ?"

Miss Haddon removed the shell from her ear, and faced her employer with a growing determination.

"I can hear Ellen's voice though we are at the other side of the house," she continued. "I half thought it was the elocution hour. Put down that paper-weight at once, please, Miss Haddon, and return to your duties."

She took the shell from the music mistress's hand, intending to place it on its proper shelf.

But the force of example caused her to raise it to her own ear. She, too, listened. . . .

She heard the rustling of trees in a wood. It was no wood that she had ever known, but all the people she had known were riding about in it, and calling softly to each other on horns. It was night, and they were hunting. Now and then beasts rustled, and once there was a "Halloo !" and a chase, but more often her friends rode quietly, and she with them, penetrating the wood in every direction and for ever.

And while she heard this with one ear, Miss Haddon was speaking as follows into the other :

"I will not return to my duties. I have neglected them ever since I came here, and once more will make little difference. I am not musical. I have deceived the pupils and the parents and you. I am not musical, but pretended that I was to make money. What will happen to me now I do not know, but I can pretend no longer. I give notice."

The Principal was surprised to learn that her music mistress was not musical ; the sound of pianos had continued for so many years that she had assumed all was well. In ordinary circumstances she would have answered scathingly, for she was an accomplished woman, but the murmuring forest caused her to reply : "Oh, Miss Haddon, not now ; let's talk it over to-morrow morning. Now, if you will, I want you to lie down in my sitting-room while I take preparation instead, for it always rests me to be with the girls."

So Miss Haddon lay down, and as she dozed the soul of the sea returned to her. And the Principal, her head full of forest murmurs, went to the preparation room, and gave her cough three times before she opened the door. All the girls were at their desks except Dolores and Violet, and them she affected not to notice. After a time she went to fetch the tree of Marie Louise, which she had forgotten, and during her absence the cavalry passed again. . . .

In the morning Miss Haddon said : "I still wish to go, but I wish I had waited to speak to you. I have had some extraordinary news. Many years ago my father saved a man from drowning. That man has just died, and he has left me a cottage by the edge of the sea, and money to live in it. I need not work any more ; so if only I had waited till to-day I could have been more civil to you and"—she blushed a little—"to myself."

But the Principal shook her by both hands and kissed her.



"I am glad that you did not wait," she said. "What you said yesterday was a word of truth, a clear call through the thicket. I wish that I, too——" She stopped. "But the next step is to give the school a whole holiday."

So the girls were summoned, and the Principal made a speech, and Miss Haddon another, giving everyone the address of the cottage, and inviting them to visit her at it. Then Rose was sent to the pastry-cook's for ices, and Enid to the greengrocer's for fruit, and Mildred to the sweetshop for lemonade, and Jane to the livery stables for brakes, and they all drove out an immense distance into the country, and played disorganised games.

Everyone hid and nobody sought ; everyone batted and nobody fielded ; no one knew whose side she was on, and no mistress tried to tell her ; and it was even possible to play two games at once, and to be Clumps in one and Peter Pan in the other.

As for the co-ordinative system, it was never mentioned, or mentioned in derision. For example, Ellen composed a song against it, which ran :

Silly old Boney  
Sat on his Pony,  
Eating his Christmas Pie,  
He put in his thumb  
And pulled out a plum,  
And said, "What a good boy am I,"

and the smaller girls sang it without stopping for three hours.

At the end of the day the Principal summoned the whole party round Miss Haddon and herself. She was ringed with happy, tired faces. The sun was setting, the dust that the day had disturbed was sinking. "Well, girls," she said, laughing, but just a little shy, "so you don't seem to value my co-ordinative system?"

"Lauks, we don't!" "Not much!" and so on, replied the girls.

"Well, I must make a confession," the Principal continued. "No more do I. In fact I hate it. But I was obliged to take it up, because that type of thing impresses the Board of Education."

At this all the mistresses and girls laughed and cheered, and Dolores and Violet, who thought that the Board of Education was a new round game, laughed too.

Now it may be readily imagined that this discreditable affair did not escape the attention of Mephistopheles. At the earliest opportunity he sought the Judgment Seat, bearing an immense scroll inscribed "*J'accuse!*" Half-way up he met the angel Raphael, who asked him in his courteous manner whether he could help him in any way.

"Not this time, thank you," Mephistopheles replied. "I really have a case now."

"It might be better to show it to me," suggested the archangel. "It would be a pity to fly so far for nothing, and you had such a disappointment over Job."

"Oh, that was different."

"And then there was Faust; the verdict there was ultimately against you, if I remember rightly."

"Oh, that was so different again. No, I am certain this time. I can prove the futility of genius. Great men think that they are understood, and are not; men think that they understand them, and do not."

"If you can prove that, you have indeed a case," said Raphael. "For this universe is supposed to rest on co-ordination, all creatures co-ordinating according to their powers."

"Listen. Charge one: Beethoven decrees that certain females shall hear a performance of his A minor quartette.

They hear--some of them a band, others a shell. Charge two : Napoleon decrees that the same shall participate in the victory of Austerlitz. Result—a legacy, followed by a school treat. Charge three : Females perform Beethoven. Being deaf, and being served by dishonest clerks, he supposes they are performing him with insight. Charge four : To impress the Board of Education, females study Napoleon. He is led to suppose that they are studying him properly. I have other points, but these will suffice. The genius and the ordinary man have never co-ordinated once since Abel was killed by Cain.”

“And now for your case,” said Raphael, sympathetically.

“My case?” stammered Mephistopheles. “Why, this is my case.”

“Oh, innocent devil,” cried the other. “Oh, candid if infernal soul. Go back to the earth and walk up and down it again. For these people have co-ordinated, Mephistopheles. They have co-ordinated through the central sources of Melody and Victory.”



T. H. WHITE

*Shining Hat at Tarring Neville*



## SHINING HAT AT TARRING NEVILLE

THERE were two Spurriers, twin brothers, who used to 'unt with the Larkspur until 1931. They came of a hard-ridin' family, which had failed to have too many children in the 'fifties, and remained pretty warm. Their parents spoiled them when they was young, bringing them up in the tradition of Jack Mytton.

Indeed, there was some sort of gossip in the county which connected the Spurriers in a left-'anded way with the squire himself. He was said to have known the great-grandmother in Boulogne, during his last days, before he lighted his nightshirt as a cure for the he-cups.

Whatever the truth of that may have been, the Spurrier boys were completely ongovernable. They were 'andsome, in a hatchet-faced sort of way, fair-haired and cold-eyed. If anybody ever did, those buoys had sold their souls to the devil. It was not only that they were reckless—like ould Mytton, they were only afraid of one thing: being afraid—but they were at the same time utterly ruthless, and treated other people with the same impartial cruelty which they gave to themselves.

It was not only that the smallest provocation would cause them to leap their 'osses over the spiked railings of the park, nor even that they set themselves systematically to accomplish each of the feats attributed to their supposed great-grandfather. Such things as that might have been the result of 'igh spirits, or devilment, or something equally innocent.

But the Spurriers were mad. The essence of madness is

the unexpected. Lunatics frighten us because they are outside the normal sequence. When they become actively so they terrify us as well. Of course, some lunatics are not terrible: Oi mean the passive ones who merely believe in themselves and remain inactive. But the active lunatics, the ones who, far from being static, are on the contrary liable to do anything at any moment, these are the scourges that reduce the normal man to terror.

The Spurriers were like this. They had a devil of action inside them, as well as a devil of contrariety and a devil of curiosity. Let me illustrate this with a story. Oi expect you have, at one time or another, twisted your sister's arm. A point is reached, you will remember, when the poor girl claims that the limb is going to break. One then has an internal struggle during which one wonders whether this is true. One gives the member a little further turn, and stops, horrified at the imaginary possibility. John Spurrier once dislocated his brother Peter's arm, to see whether it would happen. Peter, of course, never winked an eyelid. Only, about six weeks later, he stabbed his brother in the back with a penknife, and laid him up for four months.

Oi need hardly say that the twins hated each other like poison. The boys were always in the first flight of the Larkspur. 'They made a point of ridin' at anything that seemed impossible. They were magnificent horsemen, had schooled their 'osses over wire, and had broken most of the bones in their bodies. They invariably rode to cut each other down and used to have stand-up foights with any weapons that came handy, rakes, fists, pokers or dinner-knives, about once a month.

Naturally enough the hatred was akin to love. They were all in all to each other in their queer way. When they were not trying to take each other's lives, they were as thick as thieves. They loved each other like David and Jonathan; but it was the



crazy passion of a homicidal David and an incestuous Jonathan. There was something of the poet Byron and Augusta in it, something of that classical feller, Oedipus, or Shakespeare's Hamlet, or King Lear.

We normal subscribers quailed before the satanic pair, and 'ad good reason to do so. They took a cruel pleasure in practical jokes, the basic assumption on which they founded them being that everybody else was as Spartan as themselves.

They feared nothing, suffered everything, and expected the same qualities from others. So, if Peter got drunk after dinner, you might expect to have a red-hot poker laid gently across your knee, or if John's eyes looked woildly sarcastic he had locked his mother in the refrigerator.

There was the business over the Countess of Caperington, which ye may remember, since it got a certain amount of onfortunate publicity. She was cruising with them on their yacht, and they got drunk in the channel. The boys forced all hands to take to the boats, including their mother, but not including the countess. She was picked up fourteen hours later, derelict and hysterical, by Lord St. Empire, the Press baron who afterwards married her.

Oi knew them well, and always remained, like their other acquaintances, divided between fear and admiration. There was something clean and almost beautiful about their physical skill. And yet they were bounders. They had not an hatom of courtesy or humanity or toleration. They were cads in the huntin' field, and to women, and to anybody weaker than themselves.

They would have robbed a blind beggar or soaked a pussycat in paraffin and lighted it. At the same time they preserved a purely snobbish code of honour about onessentials, such as fishing solely with the dry fly, to which they adhered with a contemptuous ferocity worthy of a better cause. They would suddenly make up their minds that So-and-so was not out of the

top drawer, and systematically would set about making his life a burden to him, until he was generally thankful to sell his house and clear out of the county.

The rivalry between the Spurriers was accentuated when they fell in love with the same gel. Each of them had by now acquired an equal number of steeple-chasers, a racing car and an airplane. They rode, drove or flew with equal skill ; and it became the question which of the two would get the gel.

Relations were broken off, so that it looked as though the monthly quarrel would this time end in murder. The only thing was that they were both fond of being aloive and did not propose to be 'anged. They sat down coolly to think out schemes for killing each other, without having to take the consequences.

It was no longer a question of foul ridin' in steeplechases, or onything of that sort : it was a question of premeditated and careful slaughter. They had got to kill each other clean. A bungled affair, with a broken limb instead of a broken neck, would be wuss than useless.

The bloody business brewed up, naturally enough, during a frost. For three weeks the meets had to be cancelled and the brothers skated sullenly on the grey ice, or waited for the duck at dawn and sunset where there was running water. There was no sudden thaw. The temperature rose imperceptibly. The Master of the Larkspur is a keen man and took his 'ounds out at the first opportunity, whilst the ice was still brown on the lakes at Beldon Hall. The brothers came out on the same day.

Peter was ridin' a troublesome 'oss that had not been made any more docile by the weeks in stable. He sent him with the groom to a place about a mile from Beldon, partly with the idea of having a secluded place to mount him in the event of 'is proving fractious, partly with the idea of coming to terms with him before the actual meet.

John was riding a quiet 'oss, which he sent over the whole

way, and was to follow in the car. Peter started first. He had covered a quarter of a mile on the mettlesome steed when he heard John's car behind him. It was a brown car with four hooters, including a siren.

When John saw Peter in front of him the 'oss was walking sideways along the road. Both boys had been drinkin', on account of the frost and the gel and the general situation. John changed down two gears, accelerated until he was making the loudest possible noise, and, when he was about ten yards behind his brother, blew the siren with as many hooters as he could cover.

The 'oss stood up on each end, took two and a half leaps, and came down sideways on the tarmac with its hooves flashing in the air. You know the sidesways motion of the offside legs, and the crash and the pain. Peter was flat on the road, with his right leg under the saddle. John accelerated and ran over him slowly, taking both his near wheels across his brother's chest.

It was said by the country people, where the story is beginning to be a legend, that Peter spoke to him through the floorboards of the car.

In any case, the next groom to happen along the road, which was a lonely one, found the brothers together. The 'oss had got to its feet unhurt, and had cleared off back to the stable. John had dragged his brother to the bank at the side of the road and propped him up against the hedge. He was kneelin' in front of him, and the two were starin' each other out, eye to eye. Peter's eyes died, but never closed; he did not speak again.

John 'unted as if nothing had happened. He never afterwards referred to his brother, except at the coroner's quest, where he explained that it had been impossible to draw up in time. But a queer thing was that he took no further interest in the girl; and another thing was that he began drinkin' more heavily than ever.

Also, he began to ride badly. The people in the second flight, in which he was now riding as often as not, used to see him pulling his 'oss suddenly at fences. He appeared to change his mind at the last moment and swerve, and try to go over a few yards to the left or roight. Of course, this was scarcely fair on the 'oss and he used to get refusals ; and then he would swear in a bitter way, quite unlike the usual 'untin oaths, which are generally fifty per cent fright.

Not that I mean to imply that John wasn't afraid. It would be truer to say that he was tarrified. After about six weeks of this he began to come out tipsy, and the spirits loosened his tongue. People used to hear him talking to himself, or at any rate talking, with his head turned slightly sideways as if he were speaking to his shoulder.

It sounded like a sort of runnin' commentary, mixed with expostulations and defiance. It would rise to an eerie crescendo as he went at his fences, and then he would swerve and refuse, and curse in his soft, terrific way. In the evenings he would lock himself in the dinin'-room with his port, and talk away for hours to nobody. He used to throw decanters about, and once broke both the french windows by firing a shot-gun straight down the table.

Although he appeared to have lost his nerve entoirely, and although he seemed to be practically mad, he insisted on doin' everything which he had been accustomed to do before. He still hunted four days a week, and drove his car and flew his airplane. He went as usual to the hunt ball.

Oi was there too, and got a first-hand account of his death. It appears that he took to the champagne almost at once, and was heard offering to fight Tony Pyefinch with any weapon, or to race him on or in any vehicle, alive or dead, over a course to be selected at random. Tony Pyefinch wisely escaped by offering him another drink, and the challenge was then extended to all comers.

John immejitly began to behave like a ventriloquist without a dummy. He said to his left shoulder that he was not afraid of him or of any man, that he would certainly race him in the car from there to Tarring Neville and back again, leaving their hats on the front steps to show they had been there.

He said that he was perfectly ready to start at once, and that each driver should select his route accordin' to fancy. The important thing was to leave their hats at Tarring Neville, and the first man home to be the winner. With that he took another draught of champagne, broke the glass on the floor, and stamped off to find the car. Some of the bystanders were frightened and wondered whether they ought to do something about it.

Tony volunteered to follow him up if he could. But before they could find his car, in the muddle of radiator lights and amateur point-duty men behind the stables, the engine started up, like 'ounds scoring to cry, and swept away into the darkness with a chiming crescendo of detonations.

He was heard roaring past Dalberry Lees at about five past one ; but there was no very clear account of that. A policeman at Hickington actually witnessed the accident. He said that he heard the car coming along the Dalberry road at a terrific pace, when it was more than a mile away. The headlights swept over the ridge among the trees and burrowed through the night like a train under its lighted steam.

When he first saw the car itself it was being driven on the wrong side of the road ; so the Hickington policeman retreated as it came up to him, because of the daze of the headlights. But the moment it was past he could see John Spurrier in silhouette, and the boy was leaning across from the driver's seat, shouting to the near side of the car.

He was on the wrong camber of the road, with his foot hard down, on a moighty curve. He cried out distinctly : "Damn you, give me a bit of room ! Damn you, keep to your own side

of the road!" And then the car went through a telegraph-post as if it had been butter, climbed up the policeman's bank about fifty yards farther down, and turned over in the ditch.

There was a shining hat at Tarring Neville.

SELMA ROBINSON

*The Departure*





## THE DEPARTURE

THE doctor was worried. He shook his head while she spoke to him.

"If you thought you recognised the man on the platform, why didn't you talk to him?" he asked.

Norah sat fussing with the gardenia on her dark tweed suit. She had explained the whole incident so carefully to him just a moment ago.

"I wanted to, but I was afraid to," she said dully. "Then, when I made up my mind, somehow I found myself on the train. And he was left on the platform. He said something to me, but I didn't catch it."

The doctor shook his head again.

"There was no man on the platform," he said. "It is all part of your—your sickness. Your trouble. That man existed only in your mind. I know that you are convinced you saw your sweetheart on the elevated platform and heard him say something. But, my dear Miss Arthur, it is all part of this illness of your mind. You must believe me. I have seen so many cases like yours. In another three or four months, when you are well, you will see why I am so positive."

She drew a deep, discouraged sign and prepared to begin all over again with the sharp experience of the past hour. Perhaps if she spoke slowly, carefully. . . .

"Doctor, you don't seem to understand at all," she said. "I imagined nothing. I saw him. I know his face, his gestures. And when you remember that this was to be our wedding day. . . . He wasn't there when I first came out on the platform.

I was walking back and forth, back and forth, waiting for the train, and then suddenly I saw him, sitting there, with his bags, packed and strapped, at his feet. He must have come while I had my back turned. . . .”

“I know, I know,” interrupted Dr. Waldron kindly. “This is the third time you’ve told me. You noted a strange, wild look in his eyes that drew you even though it frightened you. You kept walking back and forth, trying to muster up enough courage to speak to him. You were aware of his eyes staring at you and calling you, but you were afraid. And then your train pulled in and you got on. And as it was drawing out of the station you could see his lips moving and you could hear his voice though you couldn’t understand what he was saying. Isn’t that so?”

Norah nodded.

“Yes, but, my dear girl, your reason must tell you that it is an utter impossibility. Your young man died six months ago. You’ve told me so frequently. Dead six months. Now come. Be sensible. How could it have been he?”

She looked hard at the doctor.

“You don’t understand yet. To-day would have been our wedding day. We were supposed to be married to-day, see, Doctor? That’s why he was there. Oh, if I only had been brave enough to speak to him, I’d know what to do now. You can’t tell me anything, anything at all.”

Dr. Waldron took her hand.

“My dear girl, I can tell you many things, but you must listen to me. You must believe what I tell you. I understand far better than you. You admit that he died. Yes. You were with him at the end. You attended his funeral. So much you know for a fact. Therefore, since you couldn’t have seen him on the platform, it must have been a creation of your poor tired mind. You’re tired to-night. There are deep lines under your eyes that I don’t like to see there.

"In the morning, when you are rested, you will be able to laugh at this difficult day. Naturally, your overwrought condition couldn't accept the tragedy that to-day was to have been your wedding day. I'll tell you what. To-night you must have dinner with a friend, a good jolly friend who will make you laugh. Then go to the theatre. See something amusing. Go somewhere to dance afterward, and stay as late as you please. You'll be so tired that you'll sleep like a brick."

She smiled at his stupidity. For three months now he had been advising diversion of one sort or another. Why were doctors so stubborn, so stupid? Every play had a hero and a heroine. A girl and a boy. Kisses. Whispered things. Herself and Ken. Ken. She frowned. In the restaurants the orchestras played love songs. The novels all had love in them. And as for friends, there was no one she knew who had not been a friend of Ken also. It was like tearing the crust off a newly healed wound. But she said to Dr. Waldron:

"That's a good idea."

He patted her hand gently when she said good night. His face looked a little worried. He was such a good soul, but such a fool not to be able to see the plainest things.

Out in the street it was almost dark. A row of yellow lights divided the lighter blue of the sky from the darker, more solid blue of the buildings. Traffic filled the Avenue, like a rapid, noisy river. People were hurrying, bent over in arcs to withstand the strong November wind. But to her it felt good, washing her face like a fresh cold water.

She did what she had to do, what she had done every night for the past week. She stepped in to telephone at the first drug-store. Stevens 4-0452. After a minute a woman's voice answered the telephone. That same colourless female voice answered. Norah remained silent to her querulous hello. The receiver at the other end clicked indignantly into place and the operator's voice now broke in.

Norah said: "I'm calling Stevens 4-0452."

The operator told her she was connected.

"But that's not the party I want," insisted Norah. "I'm calling Mr. Kenneth Stone."

A few seconds, and the voice of the telephone business office. "I'm sorry, madame. That telephone is now listed under the name of Susan Weiss. Mr. Stone's name is no longer listed in our records."

Norah knew, somehow, that it was true. But still, there was no harm. Perhaps if she kept calling he would answer the 'phone some day. It was the same way when she entered the lobby of the New Amsterdam Hotel, where they used to meet. To-night he was not among the eager men who were waiting for girls. Nor had he been there last night, nor the nights and nights and nights before that. But to-morrow, perhaps, he would be there.

If she went to enough of the old places and did all the same things, one time she was bound to be lucky; one time he would be there. It didn't take reason to believe that, so, of course, Dr. Waldron couldn't see. It took intuition. Norah smiled. The whole thing had never occurred to her in those early days after Ken's death. But now she knew that no one with Ken's vitality, his hunger for life, for the keen, small things which made each day so exciting, could just die. It wasn't natural. But it took a great deal of believing to get it all straight. It was easy to feel discouraged.

She felt discouraged again when she reached the street where she lived. Her apartment seemed so high up and the building so stern and heavy. Four windows from the top was her home, twenty storeys high. The window was dark. She wished the cleaning woman had sense enough to leave a lamp on.

All at once she felt very tired and bloodless. At the desk she asked if there had been any messages. There had been

none. In her mail box there was a reminder from her dentist and a blotter from a rug-cleaning place trying to get next spring's business.

She nodded to the elevator man, who said that it was a sharp day. Yes, very sharp, she answered. How funny to be giving and taking worthless words! What difference could it make? Cold to-night. Warm to-morrow or next summer. Saying little silly words.

She lighted the lamp near the couch, lighted the yellow lamp near the arm-chair, and gave the wood fire a shove or two with the poker. How tired she was. In the mantel over the fireplace she could see her face when she straightened up. It was pale as the gardenia on her lapel. Her lips, her eyes, and the hollows in her cheek seemed to have been painted by the same dark brush.

When she took off her hat, her hair, dark and shiny, lay flat against her head as if it were painted there, too. She remembered a poem Ken had once written her. Though she didn't like poetry, this one seemed lovely and right. It was something about a face like a water-lily and hair like seaweed at night.

Water at night always made her shudder. It looked so sinister and commanding, so treacherous. And a lost face floating around in it like a water-lily, and hair floating about it like seaweed. She sat down in the soft arm-chair and shut her eyes. The light from the lamp came through her lowered lids, but it was reassuring.

When she opened her eyes again and looked toward the couch opposite she saw Ken sitting there, surveying her with some amusement. His nose was wrinkled in a smile, and light shone on his white teeth.

"What are you doing, Norah—posing for a mask?" he asked.

She stared at him, coldness running from her scalp to her feet.

"Ken? Ken? It's you?"

"Were you expecting someone else?" he asked. Then he laughed, and it was like hearing a song she had been trying to remember.

"Ken, I can't believe it's you. I can't really believe it's you," she kept on saying.

He laughed again. "Well, who am I, then?" he demanded.

"You're Ken. You're Ken, aren't you?"

"Good work, my girl," said Ken. "But don't sit there staring at me so, as if I were a ghost. Haven't you a cigarette or a stick of chewing gum or a heartening drink for a man of my type?"

Norah cried: "Ken, darling," and sprang at him. There was that familiar smell of tobacco and shaving lotion about him. His face was cool, and a lock of his hair as he kissed her slipped out of place and brushed against her eyes.

He murmured: "I've tried so many times to get you."

"Have you, Ken?"

"To-day, on the L Station, I thought you'd stop for a moment and talk to me. Why didn't you?"

Norah said: "Ken, then it was you!"

"Infant! You're terribly hard to convince to-night, aren't you? Of course it was I. Did you think I was going to bite a piece out of you the way you ran for that train? And then, later, when you telephoned, I could hear you talking and I said 'Hello, hello.' But you didn't hear me. And in the 'New Amsterdam' I waved to you, but you went past so fast."

Norah looked at him. His eyes, next to hers, looked so big. She smoothed his cheek with her forefinger.

"But, Ken," she said, "the doctor told me I was crazy, or something. Oh, Ken, I knew, I knew. If I just kept on I knew you'd come."

Ken held her away from him for a moment and spoke to her slowly, impressively quiet.

"I've been trying for a long time, Norah. I'm tired and I can't come again. It has been months now. And you must decide this by yourself, without any coercion on my part. Listen to me carefully, sweet, and make up your mind. You know what day this is. I have come to get you, but only if you want to go. If you do want to go you must come with me now, at once. You may be frightened. You may even regret it. But I want you to know I can't come back again. I have a long, long way to go."

For answer Norah threw her arms around his neck and held him close.

"Can I put some things into a bag? Will you wait?"

Ken laughed. "You silly goose. You won't need anything. Come just as you are."

"Ken darling, let's go. Let's go quickly. I'm all ready."

They rose, and Ken took his bags, strapped as they had been earlier in the day.

"Promise me you won't be frightened; promise me you'll do just as I say, Norah."

"I promise," she said.

She followed him into the bedroom and over to the window.

He said, as they raised the window: "When I give you the signal take my arm and let yourself over the sill with me. Don't be frightened, darling. Just hold on to my arm and shut your eyes and you won't mind. I'll never let you go."

They looked down into the courtyard, twenty stories below. In the oblong of light reflected from the cellar opening they could see Steve, the service man, wheeling an ash-can into the house. Ken motioned her back.

"Wait just a minute," he said. They waited. In the apartments opposite women were in their kitchens preparing dinner.

The sounds of pots and china came from the open windows, and little wisps of steam drifted out. Again they looked down. The court was deserted. The light from the cellar was like a tomb-shaped spotlight. She turned to look at Ken. He smiled and nodded his head.

“Now,” he said.



JOHN BROPHY

*Mrs. Langpool's Buffalo*



## MRS. LANGPOOL'S BUFFALO

I ADMIT that from the first I was fascinated by Mrs. Langpool. That does not mean that I was romantic about her or that this is going to be a love story. She was at least twenty years older than I am, well on the wrong side of fifty, although she never looked it. She was a well-to-do widow, small and dark, always very daintily and fashionably turned out. You met her at first-nights and smart parties, and if she liked you you might be asked, as I was, to her chromium-and-lacquer flat in Gloucester Place.

Yet you could not put her down simply as a woman of fashion. There was something too intense about those large, burning brown eyes of hers, something too sensitive, and at the same time too mischievous about the soft, quivering mouth set in that thin, plaintive, still pretty face.

I gathered that she had a house in the country to which she retired from time to time, and perhaps it was from this that I got my first idea of her, as a woman bereft of her main interest in life since her husband's death, a woman whose mourning was immensely private, an occupation she could share with no one else. In a way, although not the way I thought of it, this first guess of mine was not far off the mark. But you can judge that for yourself later on.

At any rate, I met her four, five, perhaps half-a-dozen times during a London season, and was, as I say, fascinated by her without in the least falling in love. Perhaps I should not have felt that fascination had there not been associated with her some

hint of mystery, and scandalous mystery at that. What it was I was quite unable to track down, but more than one person dropped me a hint that not everything about Mrs. Langpool was as it ought to be or as it appeared to be.

The first shock, the first definition of this secret discrepancy in her life, came when she asked me to her country house. I was motoring down to Malvern alone, to join some friends for the theatre festival there, and I had pulled up in a little Cotswold village for petrol. While the tank was being filled I walked away to buy some cigarettes, and coming out of the little village shop I almost bumped into Mrs. Langpool.

Each of us was astonished to see the other, and when I had explained my presence she told me that she had a house not three-quarters of a mile away. I offered to drive her there and, although she said she enjoyed walking, she accepted and, as it was then four o'clock, perhaps she could not avoid asking me in to tea.

The house was large, comfortable, unremarkable from the outside, not even very old, with tree-shaded lawns in front and, at the back, a large orchard and a paddock of some size. It was this paddock which first aroused my interest. It was completely unoccupied, but it was surrounded by an unusually tall and immensely strong iron fence. In fact, you might have called that fence a palisade. It reminded me of the open-air enclosures in the Giza Zoo at Cairo.

When we went indoors I was astounded. The house was furnished in a solid Victorian manner, all polished oak and mahogany and walnut, but the lounge-hall, the dining-room into which I peeped as I passed, and the drawing-room where we sat down to tea were all decorated with trophies of the chase. On the polished wooden floors were stretched rugs made from the tawny skins of lions, the striped or spotted skins of tigers, leopards and panthers.

There were three pairs of elephants' tusks, huge and

yellowing, in the drawing-room alone, and several glass-fronted cases filled with stuffed fish and rows of sharks' teeth. And on every wall there hung the horned heads of deer and the toothy, snarling masks of lions and tigers.

The place of honour, the centre of the wall immediately opposite where my hostess sat, was occupied by the prodigious, horned head of a buffalo. It was mounted on a silver-plated plaque of mahogany, and it impended forward into the room in the most nerve-racking manner.

I looked round uneasily at this mausoleum of slain beasts, and wondered if I was expected to admire them. I also marvelled at the idea of Mrs. Langpool living here alone, except for her servants, among these grisly trophies. Her environment was all wrong. She was not the type. I was more puzzled than ever. So I decided on frankness.

"Somehow," I said, "I have never thought of you as the sort of woman who goes in for big-game hunting."

There was, I fancied, the tiniest, politest trace of mockery in her smile. "Oh, I'm not," she explained. "I couldn't even kill a fly. It was my husband who enjoyed shooting."

Theirs must have been a queer marriage, I thought to myself, and probably an unhappy one. Then I remembered my conception of Mrs. Langpool as a woman living only for the memory of her husband. If she had not loved him, was it at all likely she would be keeping up this museum of a house and living, a good part of the year at least, among all these heads and tusks and hides?

But she upset my speculation almost at once by remarking, "My husband made it a condition of his will that I should keep this house and all his trophies exactly as he left them. Not," she added with an unwonted primness, "that I should not have been glad to do so in any case."

So that was it. She had to go on living here in order to

keep the money and maintain herself as I knew her in town, with her Paris frocks and her parties and her fashionable friends. And yet she did not quite fit into that environment either. There was undoubtedly some secret about her, some part of her temperament which had broken, not the laws of the State perhaps, but one of the fundamental conventions.

It was, human nature being unpredictable in its affections, just possible that she had after all loved her husband. Sometimes people were violently attracted by those who seemed to have nothing in common with them, but for the life of me I could not imagine Mrs. Langpool, dainty, sensitive, full of concealed but intense emotion, living happily with the bluff and hearty sort of man who enjoyed himself by firing bullets into wild animals and preserving odd parts of their anatomies as souvenirs of his exploits.

So, when we had finished tea and I had lighted a cigarette (Mrs. Langpool did not smoke. It was one of the characteristics which separated her from both her Mayfair and her big-game backgrounds), I got out of my chair and wandered round the room, ostensibly to take a closer look at the stuffed fish, the tusks and the heads of the deer and the lions, but actually to examine the numerous photographs of the late Mr. Langpool standing proudly beside the beasts he had slain.

I wanted to see exactly what sort of a man it was to whom this strange woman had been married. He was, as I expected, a type hardly to be distinguished from any other big-game hunter of pre-war years, a man of sturdy build, with somewhat protruding eyes, wide-swept moustaches and a rather low forehead over which his hair fell dark and close and curling.

As soon as the notion entered my head I recognised it for a wild and irresponsible fancy, never to be breathed aloud, but for all that I could not avoid cherishing it in my mind.

There seemed to me an odd resemblance between the thick-necked, broad head of the late Mr. Langpool, as revealed in so many triumphant photographs, and the thick-necked, broad head, also with protruding glassy eyes and a mass of curly hair low on the forehead, of the deceased buffalo which occupied the place of honour and perpetually faced my hostess as she sat to her lonely meals. You cannot, at any rate, if you are as civilised as I am, suggest to a charming, plaintive, rather mysterious widow whose guest you are that her late husband bore a sort of cousinly relationship to a buffalo, but that animal's head attracted me. I said nothing, but I walked closer, and I was astonished to find inscribed on the silver plate at the foot of the mahogany mounting these words : "To the memory of darling Benjamin."

While I stood and stared, Mrs. Langpool came beside me.

"Oh," she said, "you're looking at that ? Yes, that head is rather different from the others."

"I take it this one was not shot by your husband ?"

"Dear me, no. Not at all." Again, there was that hint of concealed but gentle mockery in her smile. "Benjamin was a pet. He was captured in Africa and brought home here."

"I am glad," I remarked, a little fatuously perhaps, but I meant well, "Mr. Langpool did not shoot every animal he met."

I had dropped a brick, but my hostess, with perfect courtesy, made no alteration in her smiling demeanour. "I'm afraid you've got it wrong," she explained. "Poor dear Benjamin was captured after my husband's death. I was very fond of him, Benjamin, I mean. In fact, he lived for nearly seven years in the paddock out there."

I looked through the windows and at last understood the reason for that iron pallisade. Benjamin, in life, must have been a terrifying animal, and it was certainly a little odd to hear

Mrs. Langpool, so slender and elegant and dainty, describing him as a pet.

"Poor Benjamin caught a cold and died quiet suddenly," she went on. "I was very upset and, although my own taste does not run to taxidermy, I thought that in a house like this I could very well put up his head. Just as a souvenir, you know. A little reminder of happy days in the past."

I said good-bye a few minutes later, and if I had had to depend on Mrs. Langpool's confidences I should have got no further towards understanding that mystery so indefinitely associated with her name. Indeed, the visit to that Cotswold house, with its hunting trophies, and the story of Benjamin, the pet buffalo, had only made me more bewildered than ever.

Why I should have had to go to Hungary for further enlightenment goodness only knows. There may be some pattern discernible under the chance meetings and casual conversations of life, but I have never had more than a glimpse of it. At any rate, it was in the dining-room of the Dunapalota Hotel in Budapest, facing the Danube, with all the lights of the Buda hill-sides making the night resplendent before us, that I happened to sit at the same table with a white-haired man who turned out to be a diamond miner from South Africa.

His name does not matter, I never saw him again, and his only importance in this story is one that he did not suspect himself. We talked a little, as hotel acquaintances do, and cast around for the names of friends we might have in common. I have forgotten how Mrs. Langpool came into the conversation. But I remember he said quickly: "No, I have never met her, but I knew her husband. We went on a shooting trip together once. Poor devil, he came to a nasty end."

That aroused my curiosity at once.

"Why?" I asked. "Is there a story attached to it?"

"Oh, no. Poor old Langpool simply missed both his



shots at a buffalo, and before he could get in another the animal was on him. Finished him off in next to no time. Oh, yes, I remember. There was something queer about it. They trapped the buffalo in a pit afterwards, and Langpool's wife telegraphed out and ordered them to have it shipped home, alive. Queer, wasn't it? Made people talk a bit."

It made me think, very fast and very uncomfortably.



D. WILSON MACARTHUR

*The Chasm*



## THE CHASM

MARIA RIPOL rose to her knees, adjusting her clothes and her hair with hands that trembled still. Tonio Pujol inhaled a sharp breath as he too got up.

The darkness was absolute. The air struck chill upon them, and a steady sibilant drip of water upon rock was the only accompaniment to their gusty breathing and the hammering of Maria's heart against her ribs.

Tonio struck a match. It flared, bringing his lean, dark face into startling relief, with deep hollows under the eyes and round the mouth. It lit up, too, the stark white walls that surrounded them, the fantastic sculpture of stalactites making a grotesque forest of pillars around them. The dry pungent tobacco of Tonio's cigarette crackled, and when the match sizzled out on the wet stone it glowed brightly, illuminating his lips and the point of his nose and chin in the surrounding utter darkness.

"Ready?" he asked, abruptly.

Maria nodded, then realised that speech was necessary. She grunted an affirmative and he switched on his electric torch.

It shed a white beam that made the cave where they stood, and the tunnel leading from it, a bizarre study in chiaroscuro—white stone, wet and glistening and deep black shadows.

Marie drew in her breath with a hiss. She felt chilled,

awed, afraid a little. Her passion was all gone. Her heart still hammered, but not now with the flow of warm blood, with the urgency of desire. Her mouth felt dry.

She was beginning to experience a bitter sense of frustration.

To come back to normality—in those surroundings ! Those incredible caves of limestone, the clammy walls, the chill air . . . instead of the soporific comfort of mattress and blankets and the reassuring homeliness of familiar objects, with the stars outside.

Tonio had a slight grin. It irritated her, almost as much as the way he was humming under his breath. Tonio did not feel those things. Tonio did not care. Men were like that ; they had no feelings.

Very well. He would have to care.

“Come on,” he said, with a hint of impatience. For him, the rendezvous was finished, he was eager to be out in the open night, to bring his life back to its everyday course. Maria scowled, thinking that she was not the first to creep behind Tonio’s lean virile body through the twisting interminable tunnel that pierced the cliffs. But she knew what she was going to do about that.

In places they had to crawl. The floor was uneven. Sometimes they were climbing steeply, at others descending, when it was necessary to turn over and cling with the whole body to the slimy stone face. It seemed unending. Her stockings were torn, her dress smudged with damp patches, long before they heard the hollow rumbling that heralded the great pool.

They came upon that suddenly. To Maria, who had been here many times in the past six weeks, it was always a surprise. She forgot about it, and its terrors. Then it was there, a yawning hole under her feet, and she had to brace herself, to summon all her nerves and will power to face it.

Tonio shone his torch down. It stabbed the blackness of the great hole, and stirred to life a dull gleam that came from far below—a faint restless gleam from dark water troubled by eerie, unfathomable stirrings far underground. Maria shuddered.

The plank, a single plank ten feet long stretched across the chasm at a point where it narrowed. Rude steps cut into the stone led up from the farther side into a continuation of the tunnel. At every other point the walls of the shaft rose sheer.

Maria gritted her teeth, waiting while Tonio stepped lightly on to the plank and crossed it, setting it swinging with his weight. He leapt nimbly on to the first step beyond, and turned to shine the torch back, keeping it low so as not to dazzle Maria's eyes.

She threw her head up and, with her hands clenched tightly at her sides, walked forward. The plank bent sickeningly under her, and swayed from side to side. It was springy. It seemed that it would undoubtedly give, or else catapult her off. But suddenly she felt Tonio's hands on her, then she was in his arms, and he had swung her up to safety.

He laughed a little, with some tenderness.

"Frightened, eh? You're quite safe with your Tonio. Little Marie!"

He kissed her lightly on the lips, and went on. She followed, conscious still of nausea, of a horrible empty feeling at the pit of her stomach. They came out into the clear starlit air of the cliffs, and the boom of the fretting sea, and the swish of the stone-pines in the night wind, with a feeling of complete detachment, of peculiar anti-climax.

Tonio wanted now only to get away home. Maria was not sure what she wanted. She put her arms round his neck and

kissed him, trying to revive passion, but that was useless. It was too late.

So they picked their way along the cliff, and Marie went home. Tonio kissed her as they parted and murmured endearments; but that meant nothing.

Her heart was heavy.

Martin, her husband, was asleep. He was always asleep at ten o'clock at night. He would be utterly worn out by then, after working all day in the fields or the olive groves. Maria hated to watch him work. It meant so little. Toiling, toiling, all day long, day after day after day, and nothing to show for it. A few vegetables, a handful of grass for the cow, which lived in a byre underground and had never left its stall or seen the sunshine, or felt the wind that rustled through the groves.

Maria felt often like the cow. Not that she had any pity for the cow. A cow was a cow—something made for man's use, to be fed only because it gave its milk. She had no feeling for any animal. Cows had no feelings. All the same, she was aware of a certain kinship.

What kind of life had she that was better than the cow's?

She hated Martin. Hated him because of his poverty, because of the industry that never lightened that poverty; hated him principally because of his contentment. It never occurred to Martin to protest against the fate that was his. He was proud of his bit of land, his tumble-down cottage, his cow and his pigs and his olive trees. 'That was life. He accepted it.

He had been proud of Maria. But that was a long time ago. Now he simply paid no attention to her. Maria always complained. She was shrill-voiced, viper-tongued, petulant. Nothing was right. Rafaela had a new frock. *She* never had new frocks. Juanita's husband took her to the cine once a week. It cost a peseta, and Juanita loved it.



Maria and Martin went to the cine once a year, at fiesta time. Not Maria's fiesta—she had given up trying to keep keep fiestas. They could only afford to recognise one fiesta, when the village honoured its patron saint.

She crawled into bed beside Martin, and could hardly refrain from striking him as he lay there sleeping. She wanted to shake him awake, and scream at him that she had been away with Tonio Pujol, and Tonio was at least a man! She wanted to do something—anything—that would stir him out of his complacency, his lethargic acquiescence in fate.

But she did not.

After all, Martin was strong. He would assuredly beat her if she told him what she had done. She was not going to suffer that indignity. Tonio, now—she would not have minded if Tonio had beat her. She would have been glad, rather. She would have rejoiced in the feeling that Tonio was every inch a man, and her master. But Martin. . . .

She went to sleep, with the suddenness of an animal that has decided to sleep; and she slept, as usual, dreamlessly, so deeply that nothing could have wakened her; but her plan did not sleep. It matured itself while her conscious mind was dormant, and in the morning she knew what she must do.

She waited until evening. Then she spoke to Martin.

"Tonio Pujol is a *contrabandista*," she said abruptly. "I know where he hides his *bultos*."

Martin regarded her mildly, astonished at this brusque announcement, but scarcely interested.

"I found his *secreto*," she went on, trying to rouse him.

He made only a casual comment, and she jumped up.

"Don't you see? You fool, you're blind! He has just run a cargo in—hundreds and hundreds of sacks. I saw them.

They are stacked up and up, they are worth thousands of pesetas. Thousands! And the *carabineros*——”

A strange gleam came into Martin's mild eyes. He looked at her with sudden intentness.

“Yes?” he prompted, with a sibilant intake of breath.

“They would pay you—they would pay hundreds of pesetas—more than you earn in a whole year——”

“You mean—you want me to . . .”

“Of course! You fool, don't you see? Don't you believe me? Go and look for yourself. I'll take you. I'll show you where it is. Then you can go in and look, and afterwards you can go to the *capitan* himself and tell him, and claim the reward.”

“But Tonio,” he began, fumbling for words, “Tonio's——”

She snapped her fingers.

“What has Tonio ever done for you?” she gibed savagely.

“All right,” he said. “You show me.”

She nodded, her eyes glinting.

“To-night,” she said. “After ten o'clock. I'll go and borrow a torch. . . .”

She went off, with a shawl over her head—straight to Tonio's cottage, at the far end of the village. No one saw her.

“Tonio,” she said, in a vivid whisper, when he came out to her, “Martin's discovered your *secreto*. He's going to visit it to-night, to get some samples, and then he's going to get the *carabineros*, and denounce it to them and claim the reward.”

Tonio swore, his sharp eyes peering at her in the darkness.

“I'll—I'll——”

“You must kill him, Tonio. That's what he deserves. And he told me! He never suspected. . . . They might kill you. They would if you tried to resist them. You know it's their orders. You'll have to lose it all, or else . . .”

"You—can't you do anything?"

"He's strong. I couldn't keep him back. And it would take you days to get rid of the stuff. You'd lose——"

"*Carajo!* To be betrayed by a friend!"

He stood for a moment biting his lower lip, then gnawing the knuckles of one hand while he thought.

"*Dios!*" he said at last. "He won't come back from the *secreto!*"

Maria borrowed a torch from him and went away home quickly, forgetting to kiss Tonio. Her heart sang. She knew that she had won.

She would be rid of Martin; and Tonio could not get rid of her. She would be there. She would watch, would see Martin killed, and then let Tonio know that she had seen. After that Tonio would never be able to leave her, or she would denounce him to the police.

She felt that she had been very clever.

She had wanted to be rid of Martin for a long time. For years he had given her no money at all, except enough to keep the house. At first, certainly, he had been generous; and she had spent lavishly, for what else was money for? Then he had objected to her extravagance as he called it, and she had never had any money to speak of after that.

Tonio was different. He was open-handed, he liked to spend his money—liked to watch it go. It amused him. He could always get plenty more. With Tonio she could spend as much as she liked. She would be rich.

It was only recently that she had wanted to be rid of Martin with special fervour and passion, for Tonio had ignored her entirely until two months ago. And she had known all about Tonio. He was fickle, you could not trust him.

But she had no intention of getting rid of one husband only to be left in the lurch by the next—or find that Tonio would not marry her at all. So she had devised her scheme.

When Martin was dead Tonio would be hers ; he would never be able to leave her. She would bind him to her by her knowledge of his guilt. Oh, she had been very clever !

Martin and she set out soon for the cliffs. When they reached the jumble of rocks where the tunnel began she went down on her knees and crawled, pulling Martin after her, then thrust back the bushes and pointed to the fissure that was the entrance.

Martin nodded, and lay for a while listening carefully. Then he crawled inside. Maria followed, but at a discreet distance. She had promised to remain outside, and keep watch, and warn him if Tonio came. But she knew Tonio was already there.

She could follow easily, for she knew the way, and there was sufficient diffused light from Martin's torch to keep her from stumbling, or knocking against any of the spurs of stone that jutted out from the walls.

At last she was lying on her stomach, looking down towards the pool. This would be where Tonio was waiting—on the far side.

Martin stood for a long moment, flashing his torch this way and that, looking curiously at the narrow plank that spanned the corner of the abyss. Then he stepped on to the plank and began walking across it, picking his steps carefully, for the wood was wet and slimy.

He reached the far side, while Maria held her breath ; and suddenly he stumbled, and the torch went out. There was a faint clatter above the muttering rumble of the pool. Then the light blazed again, and she saw him on his feet, picking his way into the tunnel.

So Tonio was letting him get farther—perhaps right into the *secreto*, where he would be at his mercy ! Or perhaps . . .

Maria lay still for a few moments more, then grew uneasy. The light was dimming. Martin was turning a corner, going out of sight.

She crawled forward, went down the steps to the edge of the shaft. She became agitated, thinking that perhaps Tonio suspected, and meant to cheat her by killing Martin where she could not watch. She must know. Having come so far, she dared not let herself be frustrated now.

She steeled herself, peering at the plank, for now there was little light, only the glow thrown back by the white walls. The shaft beneath her looked a more sombre, more menacing black. Her foot found the plank, and she started along it. Terror mounted, gripping her stomach like a wrench, and chilling her heart. A cold sweat came out on her face, and her knees trembled, feeling weak. But she went on, determined not to be cheated, and the plank swayed and sprung under her.

Suddenly it shifted. It shifted a full inch, and she felt the jolt through all her body, right up from her feet to her brain. Her scalp tingled, and she stopped, her pulse stopping as well.

She took another step, and the plank shifted again. It lurched. It jerked, then for one long sickening moment she was aware of being suspended in air, of having no support beneath her. The plank swung, tilted, and dived into the darkness below.

Her scream deafened her, rang and rang in the shaft, through the tunnels, among the fantastic masonry stalactites, as she fell, endlessly. The splash that followed shot a shower of spray up almost to the level of the tunnel and boomed up the shaft, and rolled like thunder along the roof of the caves.

When it had died away, and only the low growl of the pool and the steady drip of water could be heard again, Tonio and

Martin, hidden from sight of the chasm by a grotesque stalagmite, looked into each other's eyes, silently, and clasped hands.

Tonio, pulling another plank forward to place across the gap, looked curiously at the place from which Martin, bending down when he had pretended to stumble, and had switched off the torch, had loosened the other plank. When he straightened up he smiled.

As if Martin would ever have betrayed his own partner !

HOWARD JONES

*Marriott's Monkey*





## MARRIOTT'S MONKEY

I MUST get this down before my reason goes. There is not much time. The pen keeps slipping from my fingers, and my eyes turning to the silver witch-bowl hanging in the window. It is a pretty thing, that witch-bowl. It fascinates me. But it has nothing to do with this story. I must write fast.

It's all about Marriott and his damned monkey. At least, nearly all. Perhaps you recall the name—the Edward Spencer Marriott, who produced a standard work on African mammalia before he was thirty, and whose address to the Royal Society on Mankind's affinity with the apes shocked alike the preachers and the scientific pundits.

To see him you'd never have credited him with brains. He was a hulk of a fellow, standing six foot two in his socks, with a hard, square jaw, and green, childish eyes. At college they called him "The Yokel" because of his simplicity and tenderness—and perhaps out of envy too. The sight of an animal in pain was a physical hurt in him, and because of it he gave himself to the study of things dumb and helpless. Intellectually none of us was in his class. He was a genius, a giant amongst pygmies. I think it was because I had a better understanding of his shy, soft nature than most men that we became close friends. We passed through and qualified together, Marriott's name at the top of the list, and mine somewhere towards the bottom.

Not long after he came down Marriott went to Africa to

collect material for his book. My game was horses, and I moved to Epsom to be near the racing stables. After eighteen months Marriott returned to England, but went abroad again as soon as his book was published. This time he was away six months. When he returned he brought the monkey with him.

He told me all about it one day over lunch in a Bloomsbury restaurant. It was a young male, but I forget now to what particular species it belonged. My memory has gone all to pieces in the past few weeks. It doesn't matter, anyway. Marriott had bought the monkey for ten pounds from the skipper of a cargo boat at Lagos. He believed it was a very good bargain.

"I don't know what made me buy Moka," he said, in answer to one of my questions. "I just felt I *had* to have him, if you understand. He's a fine chap, tame as you please. You must drop in one evening during the week and see him for yourself."

When I first saw the monkey a few days later I was amused. Marriott was carrying it on his shoulders, pick-a-back fashion, and running up and down his strip of garden, excited as a schoolboy. At the sound of my voice he turned, and over his left shoulder I saw the animal's mouth pressed, as though in affection against the carotid artery in his neck.

"Hey, Moka," he said, with a rather self-conscious laugh, "meet a new friend." And unclasping the monkey's fingers from his collar, he lifted it into my arms.

It rested there, docile and motionless, for all the world as though it were asleep. I could tell by the hardness of the thigh muscles, and the gleaming softness of its coat that it was in beautiful condition. It raised its upper lip. The teeth were white and clenched. I don't pretend to know much about monkeys, but those clenched jaws seemed—well, peculiar.

As I drew my fingers from its mouth the monkey slowly

opened its eyes. Those eyes! Such hatred and malevolence was in them that for some seconds I could only stare back, letting the evil of their look go icily through and through me. Then warmth came into me, and instinctively I pushed the monkey from me. It dropped lightly to the lawn, and curving an elbow on Marriott's leg, slobbered like a sorry child against his knee. Crouching there on the grass, it was a picture of innocence and affection; yet somehow I could not escape the conviction that it was trying to fool me. Almost as if to confirm my thought, it twisted suddenly, and moved swiftly on curved knuckles down the garden to where a blue Persian cat was preening itself in a patch of sunlight.

"Here, Moka—come here!" called Marriott, sharply.

The cat stood rigid with arched back and thickened tail. At my friend's command the monkey paused doubtfully, then turned, and slowly lumbered back.

"Poor Peter!" said Marriott. "Moka would shake the life out of him if I gave him half a chance!"

"Poor Peter," I said.

We turned into the house, the monkey at our heels. Marriott busied himself with a decanter and syphon, and placed a drink at my elbow.

"What made you drop Moka the way you did?" he asked, settling himself in a chair.

I glanced down to where the monkey was tossing a big rubber ball over its head, catching it with his feet, and throwing it up again.

"I think I must be on Peter's side," I answered, with a grin.

"Oh, you needn't worry about the cat," said Marriott. "Moka's with me most of the daytime, and at night, during this warm weather, I lock him in the shed at the bottom of the garden. Peter sleeps in my room. He's privileged, you see." To the monkey, he said: "Now, Moka, go and shake hands like a gentleman."

The animal's intelligence really was bewildering. It shambled across the carpet, and stretched out a limp and leathery hand. I gripped it, and dropped it, and avoided the artful, upward flash of its dark eyes.

I shall have to rest my hand at this point. It's so awkward to hold the pen, and continual writing gives me the most damnable cramp. . . . Yes, that's better now. That witch-bowl glistens beautifully in the summer sunlight. Where was I? Oh, yes . . .

An outbreak of coughing in Lord Henry Piggot's stables took me unexpectedly to Newmarket, and a month passed before I visited Marriott again.

I was aware of a subtle yet distinct change in him. His eyes had lost their alertness to a glaze of infinite exhaustion. His shoulders were slightly curved, his head set more closely upon them. When he walked, his arms dangled listlessly, with a curious suggestion of length, and his knees sagged as if the effort of movement were too much for them. The general impression I received was not exactly that of old age, but of a physical crumpling—as if some swift and terrible disease had sapped the vital essences of his body. I wondered if he had been overworking, and asked him (off-handedly, I hoped) how his work of classifying the African languria was progressing.

He answered in a strained and throaty voice :

"Haven't touched it, not for a fortnight. Can't settle to work. Touch of nerves. You know how it is sometimes. Let's have a drink, shall we?"

As he turned to lead the way into the lounge, I noticed a small oval-shaped weal on the left side of his neck, set dead across the carotid artery.

"I see you still nurse Moka," I remarked.

"Why—yes, yes," he returned, testily. "Habit of his, kissing me there . . . Peculiar beast . . . affectionate."

At that moment the monkey stirred in a corner of the room, and crossing the floor, climbed into Marriott's chair. It sat there with drooping arms, its eyes closed in an expression of utter lethargy. Something unusual in its appearance impelled me to approach it; and I saw the hair above its temples was flecked with grey. It made no movement until I raised its lip, and then it swung its head away, and set up a beastly, chattering scream.

But I had seen its teeth—and they were yellow. There was no doubt about it. The monkey was ageing fast.

Marriott turned from the sideboard, and murmured caressingly: "There, Moka, there!" He lifted the monkey, and sitting down, set it on his knees, where it rested like some ungainly, sleepy baby. In that same moment he looked towards me, and I swear that beneath the dead expression of his eyes he signalled me an appeal for help.

I was certain then that something dreadful was happening in the house, something beyond my understanding. I was certain, too, that the monkey was at the bottom of it.

"The drinks—there on the sideboard," said Marriott quickly, as though to cover a lapse. "You might—might give me mine." As he took his tumbler from me, I all but cried out. For he grasped it with his palm and his fingers, with his thumb stuck out awkwardly and uncontrolled, just as a monkey would.

I said, when I had drained my glass:

"You need a holiday, Marriott. Try a sea trip, or Majorca for a couple of months. Anywhere to get away from London."

"What about Moka?" he asked, sullenly.

"Send him to a dealer," I suggested. "Or the Zoo might be glad . . ."

He jumped up, and the monkey swung round his body, and pressed its mouth to his neck.

"You hate him, don't you?" he cried angrily. "Yes, that's

it, you hate him! Want me to get rid of him, don't you?" He paused, sat, then added with better composure: "Sorry, old man. . . . Didn't mean anything. I don't want to go away. Just want to stop here. That's all."

Later that evening, after we had locked the monkey in its shed for the night, I broached the subject again.

"For the sake of your friends, if not for your own sake, you *ought* to go away," I urged; and something soft and purring rubbed against my leg.

Looking down, Marriott answered:

"That dam' cat's fond of you! No, I shan't go away. Don't want to. . . . Dam' cat!"

When I telephoned Marriott three days later to tell him my flat was being redecorated, and that I wanted him to put me up until the work was finished, he knew I was lying. That much was obvious from his suspicious, disjointed haggling. He did not want me—and both of us knew why. But eventually my determination overcame him, and he begrudgingly agreed. I heard him replace the receiver in its hook at the third attempt.

In the following fortnight there were many times when I regretted the impulse of friendship that had sent me to Marriott's side. I had no plans, only a sort of vague hope that somehow my presence would bring him back to normal. But before long I was forced to the conclusion that I served only to bind him and his devilish monkey to a closer relationship. Except at night they were inseparable; and the filthy weal on Marriott's neck grew more and more pronounced as each day passed.

It was terrible to hear his voice becoming shriller and shriller in pitch; to see him playing with the ball, and fumbling with his knife and fork at meal times like a clumsy child; to come across him padding barefooted from room to room, with the monkey clamped to his back. On the first day of my

stay with him, I lured him from the house on the pretext of exercise, but, after half a mile, he complained of pain in his dorsal muscles, and only by leaning forward, so that his fingers reached to his knees, could he get relief.

After that he adopted a clumsy cunning to avoid me. One morning I saw him pass through the front door, as if bent on an errand. Less than a minute later there was a scuffling in the garden, and he jumped down from an eight foot wall with the agility of—well, a monkey. For a few yards he crept in the shadow of some laurel bushes, then made a dash to the door of the monkey's shed. When he found this ruse failed he took to locking himself with the monkey in his bedroom, in the bathroom, and even in the cellars. His appearance at this time was really shocking, for apart from the increasing emphasis of a withering physique, he found it impossible to shave, or to knot his tie and shoe laces.

Two things in that fortnight saved my sanity. One was the friendliness of Peter, the cat. The other the amazing physical changes in the monkey. It aged beyond belief, as though in pouring out its spiritual self, it had induced a swift decay of the physical body. Eventually it lacked even the strength to fasten its fingers on Marriott's shoulders, so that he was forced to support it by placing his hands beneath its buttocks. Its eyes became jaundiced, and the hatred they had once shown me was replaced by a sort of languid tolerance.

If only the thing would die, I thought—and cursed myself for not thinking of it before.

We locked it in the shed that night at ten. Marriott went off without a word, and I was heartily glad to see the back of him. The vivid weal on his neck was making me feel sick. The cat, according to its custom, followed him upstairs. For two hours I sat alone in the lounge, smoking my pipe and drinking. Then I went into the hall, and took from the wall a

knobkerrie Marriott had picked up on one of his tropical visits.

The monkey was hunched in a corner of the shed. In the dim light its eyes seemed triumphantly alive. I swung the knobkerrie, and it was soon over. At the second blow the skull cracked. At the third it shattered.

I washed the knobkerrie under the kitchen tap. As I was replacing it on the hook in the hall there reached me from above a sharp, single scream of feline agony. . . . I took the stairs three at a time—but deep within me there was already the conviction that I was beaten.

The cat lay just beneath the bed, its tongue lolling, its eyes wide and glazed. And Marriott's horrible metamorphosis was complete. He was in the centre of the room, stark naked, his body hooped, and resting on bent fingers. I had time to see that his eyebrows had sunk to a single line, that his nostrils were flattened and dilated, before he sprang at me. He dragged me to the ground, bit at my face, my neck, clawed at my shoulders with his hands, at my legs with his feet. I fought with the strength of ten, with strength born of primeval fear. . . . And, somehow, I was outside the room, and he was screeching and chattering on the other side of the door. I turned the key. I fainted.

I have had to rest my hand again, a long, long rest this time. But the strength hasn't come back as it ought to. It's agony to touch the pen. I don't care. The story is all but told. I wish you could see that lovely witch-bowl. I feel I must get my fingers about it. I'll try to write for just five minutes more. It's hurting my brain, this effort, as well as my hand.

In five years I've only visited the thing in Brookfield Asylum once. The doctors call it Marriott, but I know better. They won't believe me when I tell them it's not Marriott, but that damned monkey of his.



They phoned me seven weeks ago to tell me Marriott was dying. He'd become terribly old, they said. Now, listen. I told you Marriott bit at my face and neck, didn't I? Well, he got my carotid artery. I'm sure if it now. They took me to a nursing home and cauterised me, and put stitches in. But it was too late. He'd got me.

The thing in Brookfield is dying, and my thumb sticks out awkwardly, and I've grown to hate cats.

And there's that lovely witch-bowl I want to play with.



M. R. JAMES

*A School Story*



## A SCHOOL STORY

TWO men in a smoking-room were talking of their private-school days. "At *our* school," said A., "we had a ghost's footmark on the staircase. What was it like? Oh, very unconvincing. Just the shape of a shoe, with a square toe, if I remember right. The staircase was a stone one. I never heard any story about the thing. That seems odd, when you come to think of it. Why didn't somebody invent one, I wonder?"

"You can never tell with little boys. They have a mythology of their own. There's a subject for you, by the way—'The Folklore of Private Schools.'"

"Yes; the crop is rather scanty, though. I imagine, if you were to investigate the cycle of ghost stories, for instance, which the boys at private schools tell each other, they would all turn out to be highly compressed versions of stories out of books."

"Nowadays, the fiction magazines would be extensively drawn upon."

"No doubt; they weren't born or thought of in *my* time. Let's see. I wonder if I can remember the staple ones that I was told. First, there was the house with a room in which a series of people insisted on passing a night; and each of them in the morning was found kneeling in a corner, and had just time to say, 'I've seen it,' and died."

"Wasn't that the house in Berkeley Square?"

"I dare say it was. Then there was the man who heard a noise in the passage at night, opened his door, and saw someone

crawling towards him on all fours with his eye hanging out on his cheek. There was besides, let me think—yes ! the room where a man was found dead in bed with a horseshoe mark on his forehead, and the floor under the bed was covered with marks of horseshoes also ; I don't know why. Also there was the lady who, on locking her bedroom door in a strange house heard a thin voice among the bed-curtains say, 'Now we're shut in for the night.' None of those had any explanation or sequel. I wonder if they go on still, those stories."

"Oh, likely enough—with additions from the magazines, as I said. You never heard, did you, of a real ghost at a private school ? I thought not ; nobody has that ever I came across."

"From the way in which you said that, I gather that *you* have."

"I really don't know ; but this is what was in my mind. It happened at my private school thirty odd years ago, and I haven't any explanation of it.

"The school I mean was near London. It was established in a large and fairly old house—a great white building with very fine grounds about it ; there were large cedars in the garden, as there are in so many of the older gardens in the Thames valley, and ancient elms in the three or four fields which we used for our games. I think probably it was quite an attractive place, but boys seldom allow that their schools possess any tolerable features.

"I came to the school in a September, soon after the year 1870 ; and among the boys who arrived on the same day was one whom I took to : a Highland boy, whom I will call McLeod. I needn't spend time in describing him : the main thing is that I got to know him very well. He was not an exceptional boy in any way—not particularly good at books or games—but he suited me.

"The school was a large one : there must have been from a hundred and twenty to a hundred and thirty boys there as a

rule, and so a considerable staff of masters was required, and there were rather frequent changes among them.

“One term—perhaps it was my third or fourth—a new master made his appearance. His name was Sampson. He was a tallish, stoutish, pale, black-bearded man. I think we liked him : he had travelled a good deal, and had stories which amused us on our school walks, so that there was some competition among us to get within earshot of him. I remember, too—dear me, I have hardly thought of it since then !—that he had a charm on his watch-chain that attracted my attention one day, and he let me examine it. It was, I now suppose, a gold Byzantine coin ; there was an effigy of some absurd emperor on one side ; the other side had been worn practically smooth, and he had had cut on it—rather barbarously—his own initials, G. W. S., and a date, July 24th, 1865. Yes, I can see it now : he told me he had picked it up in Constantinople : it was about the size of a florin, perhaps rather smaller.

“Well, the first odd thing that happened was this. Sampson was doing Latin grammar with us. One of his favourite methods—perhaps it is rather a good one—was to make us construct sentences out of our own heads to illustrate the rules he was trying to make us learn. Of course, that is a thing which gives a silly boy a chance of being impertinent : there are lots of school stories in which that happens—or, anyhow, there might be. But Sampson was too good a disciplinarian for us to think of trying that on with him. Now, on this occasion he was telling us how to express *remembering* in Latin : and he ordered us each to make a sentence bringing in the verb *memini*, ‘I remember.’ Well, most of us made up some ordinary sentence such as, ‘I remember my father,’ or ‘He remembers his book,’ or something equally uninteresting : and I dare say a good many put down *memino librum meum*, and so forth : but the boy I mentioned—McLeod—was evidently thinking of something more elaborate than that. The rest of

us wanted to have our sentences passed, and get on to something else, so some kicked him under the desk, and I, who was next to him, poked him and whispered to him to look sharp. But he didn't seem to attend. I looked at his paper and saw he had put down nothing at all. So I jogged him again harder than before and upbraided him sharply for keeping us all waiting. That did have some effect. He started and seemed to wake up, and then very quickly he scribbled about a couple of lines on his paper, and showed it up with the rest.

"As it was the last, or nearly the last, to come in, and as Sampson had a good deal to say to the boys who had written *meminiscimus patri meo* and the rest of it, it turned out that the clock struck twelve before he got to McLeod, and McLeod had to wait afterwards to have his sentence corrected. There was nothing much going on outside when I got out, so I waited for him to come. He came very slowly when he did arrive, and I guessed there had been some sort of trouble. 'Well,' I said, 'what did you get?' 'Oh, I don't know,' said McLeod, 'nothing much: but I think Sampson's rather sick with me.' 'Why, did you show him up some rot?' 'No fear,' he said. 'It was all right as far as I could see; it was like this: *Memento*—that's right enough for remember, and it takes a genitive—*memento putei inter quatuor taxos*.' 'What silly rot! What made you shove that down? What does it mean?' 'That's the funny part,' said McLeod. 'I'm not quite sure what it does mean. All I know is it just came into my head and I corked it down. I know what I *think* it means, because just before I wrote it down I had a sort of picture of it in my head; I believe it means "Remember the well among the four"—what are those dark sort of trees that have red berries on them?' 'Mountain ashes, I s'pose you mean.' 'I never heard of them,' said McLeod; 'no—I'll tell you—yews.' 'Well, and what did Sampson say?' 'Why, he was jolly odd about it. When he read it he got up and went to the mantelpiece and



stopped quite a long time without saying anything, with his back to me. And then he said, without turning round, and rather quietly, "What do you suppose that means?" I told him what I thought; only I couldn't remember the name of the silly tree: and then he wanted to know why I put it down, and I had to say something or other. And after that he left off talking about it, and asked me how long I'd been here, and where my people lived, and things like that: and then I came away: but he wasn't looking a bit well.'

"I don't remember any more that was said by either of us about this. Next day McLeod took to his bed with a chill or something of the kind, and it was a week or more before he was in school again. And as much as a month went by without anything happening that was noticeable. Whether or not Mr. Sampson was really startled, as McLeod had thought, he didn't show it. I am pretty sure, of course, now that there was something very curious in his past history, but I'm not going to pretend that we boys were sharp enough to guess any such thing.

"There was one other incident of the same kind as the last which I told you. Several times since that day we had had to make up examples in school to illustrate different rules, but there had never been any row, except when we did them wrong. At last there came a day when we were going through those dismal things which people call Conditional Sentences, and we were told to make a conditional sentence expressing a future consequence. We did it, right or wrong, and showed up our bits of paper, and Sampson began looking through them. All at once he got up, made some odd sort of noise in his throat, and rushed out by a door that was just by his desk. We sat there for a minute or two and then—I suppose it was incorrect—but we went up, I and one or two others, to look at the papers on his desk. Of course, I thought someone must have put down some nonsense or other, and Sampson had gone off to report him. All the same, I noticed that he

hadn't taken any of the papers with him when he ran out. Well, the top paper on the desk was written in red ink—which no one used—and it wasn't in anyone's hand who was in the class. They all looked at it—McLeod and all—and took their dying oaths that it wasn't theirs. Then I thought of counting the bits of paper. And of this I made quite certain : that there were seventeen bits of paper on the desk and sixteen boys in the form. Well, I bagged the extra paper and kept it, and I believe I have it now. And now you will want to know what was written on it. It was simple enough and harmless enough, I should have said.

“*‘Si tu non veneris ad me, ego veniam ad te,’* which means, I suppose, ‘If you don't come to me, I'll come to you.’”

“Could you show me the paper ?” interrupted the listener.

“Yes, I could : but there's another odd thing about it. That same afternoon I took it out of my locker—I know for certain it was the same bit, for I made a finger-mark on it—and no single trace of writing of any kind was there on it. I kept it, as I said, and since that time I have tried various experiments to see whether sympathetic ink had been used, but absolutely without result.

“So much for that. After about half an hour Sampson looked in again : said he had felt very unwell, and told us we might go. He came rather gingerly to his desk, and gave just one look at the uppermost paper : and I suppose he thought he must have been dreaming ; anyhow, he asked no questions.

“That day was a half-holiday, and next day Sampson was in school again, much as usual. That night the third and last incident in my story happened.

“We—McLeod and I—slept in a dormitory at right-angles to the main building. Sampson slept in the main building on the first floor. There was a very bright full moon. At an hour which I can't tell exactly, but probably between one and two, I was woke up by somebody shaking me. It was McLeod,

and a nice state of mind he seemed to be in. 'Come,' he said, 'come! There's a burglar getting in through Sampson's window.' As soon as I could speak, I said, 'Well, why not call out and wake everybody up?' 'No, no,' he said. 'I'm not sure who it is. Don't make a row, come and look.' Naturally, I came and looked, and naturally there was no one there. I was cross enough, and should have called McLeod plenty of names, only—I couldn't tell why—it seemed to me that there *was* something wrong, something that made me very glad I wasn't alone to face it. We were still at the window looking out, and as soon as I could, I asked him what he had heard or seen. 'I didn't hear anything at all,' he said, 'but about five minutes before I woke you, I found myself looking out of this window here, and there was a man sitting or kneeling on Sampson's window-sill, and looking in, and I thought he was beckoning.' 'What sort of man?' McLeod wriggled. 'I don't know,' he said, 'but I can tell you one thing—he was beastly thin, and he looked as if he was wet all over, and,' he said, looking round and whispering as if he hardly liked to hear himself, 'I'm not at all sure that he was alive.'

"We went on talking in whispers some time longer, and eventually crept back to bed. No one else in the room woke or stirred the whole time. I believe we did sleep a bit afterward, but we were very cheap next day.

"And next day Mr. Sampson was gone : not to be found : and I believe no trace of him has ever come to light since. In thinking it over, one of the oddest things about it all has seemed to me to be the fact that neither McLeod nor I ever mentioned what we had seen to any third person whatever. Of course, no questions were asked on the subject, and if they had been, I am inclined to believe that we could not have made any answer : we seemed unable to speak about it.

"That is my story," said the narrator. "The only approach to a ghost story connected with a school that I know, but still, I think, an approach to such a thing."

\*     \*     \*     \*     \*

The sequel to this may perhaps be reckoned highly conventional ; but a sequel there is, and so it must be produced. There had been more than one listener to the story, and, in the latter part of that same year, or of the next, one such listener was staying at a country house in Ireland.

One evening his host was turning over a drawer full of odds and ends in the smoking-room. Suddenly he put his hand upon a little box. "Now," he said, "you know about old things ; tell me what that is." My friend opened the little box and found in it a thin gold chain with an object attached to it. He glanced at the object and then took off his spectacles to examine it more narrowly. "What's the history of this ?" he asked. "Odd enough," was the answer. "You know the yew thicket in the shrubbery. Well, a year or two back we were cleaning out the old well that used to be in the clearing here, and what do you suppose we found ?"

"Is it possible that you found a body ?" said the visitor, with an odd feeling of nervousness.

"We did that ; but, what's more, in every sense of the word, we found two."

"Good Heavens ! Two ? Was there anything to show how they got there ? Was this thing found with them ?"

"It was. Amongst the rags of the clothes that were on one of the bodies. A bad business, whatever the story of it may have been. One body had the arms tight round the other. They must have been there thirty years or more—long enough before we came to this place. You may judge we filled the well up fast enough. Do you make anything of what's cut on that gold coin you have there ?"

"I think I can," said my friend, holding it to the light (but he read it without much difficulty) ; "it seems to be 'G. W. S., July 24, 1865.'"

JOHN GLOAG

*Galley Trot Blind*



## GALLEY TROT BLIND

**I**T was a nice house party ; small, but with enough variety of folk to keep it lively. It was a nice house. Old, quiet, standing like it was asleep, in a hollow somewhere around the middle of Suffolk. Gifford Hall was the name. There was a garden with old-world stuff—yew hedges and such.

As I'm just reporting what happened, I'll list the people, like a news story. I saw the affair from the outside ; a foreigner always can, and an American's making a bad break if he thinks he isn't a foreigner in England just because the folk happen to be speaking almost the same language.

There was my host, George Clovid, a way-up barrister. His wife Lydia, the sort of blonde who's picked on to overturn empires—at Hollywood. Clovid was quiet, good-looking, had what's called a sense of humour in England. He'd got a rich, fruity voice, worth fifty grand a year in any court. His lay was to let others talk, and I had a hunch he gathered folk around him to hear 'em knock sparks outa each other.

Next was Nigel Ainton, another barrister. Quiet, till he got lit up with some audit ale that the undergraduate had brought over from Cambridge College, which was about twenty miles away. Ainton was odd, had a queer way of putting things.

Then there was the undergraduate—Ernest Saxel. He was going to pass out of college straight into the army, and I guess there was a kind of conspiracy among the other men who had

all served in the war to pull some old soldier stuff over that lad. He was plenty polite, and maybe he swallowed it all; if he didn't I hand it to him for manners. Yes, *sir*!

Then there was Oliver and Mavis Dane. Dane I'd met crossing over last Fall when I left the States. One of those highbrow writers and art critics. Fat, about forty—absolutely O.K. with himself. His wife, Mavis, was another blonde. About the calmest proposition I've ever met. Then there was a young actress, Isobel Frond. Another blonde. England's well stocked with them, though they're not all up to the standard that had gotten together at Gifford Hall.

My job got me roving round England. My name's Windle. Dane and I had kinda taken to each other, and I saw something of him, and it was through him that I got invited to Gifford.

Gifford Hall, so Clovid told me, was a thirteenth-century house with an eighteenth-century middle bit in red brick. The rest was real oak beams with yellowish plaster in between and a general effect of everything falling over and just being held back because it wasn't English to go too far in any direction.

The English week-end starts with Friday dinner, and I drove to Gifford from Ipswich on a winter afternoon. The country looked bare, but the little hills they run to in Suffolk made it seem cosy. It was dark when I made the Hall, and Clovid got me feeling at home right away.

"We're going to be very informal," said Clovid, "so don't bother to dress."

I went up to my bedroom and found I'd got a wood fire, a lot of smoke and about as much heat as would take the chill off a glass of water, supposing you put it three inches from the fireplace. They hadn't heard of central heating. There was a four-post bed complete with curtains. The plumbing was O.K. and the water hot. I got straightened up and went downstairs to meet folks. Clovid was handing out cocktails—no, I'm wrong, it was madeira and sherry. Dane did most of the



talking. Presently he said to Clovid : "Oh, George, any more news about the Galley Trot?"

I thought it was a horse or something until Clovid said : "No, and I don't want any, thanks very much ; once was enough."

"Oh, what was that?" asked Ainton. Lydia Clovid said "Haven't you heard about the Galley Trot? It's a huge black dog——"

"No, a white one," George interrupted ; "get the facts right."

"Anyway," said Lydia, "George woke up shrieking one night about a year ago because he'd been dreaming that a hooded figure had come out of the cupboard in our bedroom, leading a huge dog, and had ordered the dog to attack George, and the dog jumped at him and scratched and bit his face and arm. When I turned the light on I found his face and right arm streaming with blood."

"Yes," said George, "when I went and bathed the blood off I found a lot of queer scratches on my cheek and forearm."

"We couldn't find anything that might have caused it," Lydia put in ; "I thought perhaps there were pins in the bed or something, but there was nothing that could possibly have made those marks."

"My dear, what an awful experience," said Mrs. Dane.

"I wonder your hair didn't turn snow-white, like Marie Antoinette's," Nigel Ainton remarked.

"What turned Marie Antoinette's hair snow-white?" asked Miss Frond.

"Oh, bothering about being guillotined," he replied.

"Anyway," said Mrs. Clovid, not being side-tracked by Marie Antoinette, "it proved to us that we'd seen the Galley Trot."

"What *is* the Galley Trot?" asked young Saxel.

"Why, that dog that attacked George," said Mrs. Clovid.

"There's a regular legend about it," said George Clovid, and at that moment one of those quiet, mechanical sort of English maids just shimmered into the room and announced dinner.

After dinner we gathered round the fire in the oak-panelled sitting-room, and we heard some more about this Galley Trot. Clovid turned up a lot of records that he'd copied from some old medieval manuscripts in the library or museum at Ipswich. Most of them were in Latin, and Ainton, who was a Latin scholar, read them off like a priest reeling off prayers and translating them as he went along.

There was some yarn about St. Botolph, one of those Saxon saints who was domiciled locally, having his remains or relics removed from some part of Suffolk up to Bury St. Edmunds, and on the way the monks who were toteing him around stopped at a place called Bath Slough, which was supposed to be about a mile from Gifford Hall. Now there was a whole lot of treasure travelling with those remains. Ainton said it was called "St. Botolph's blood," but as that didn't seem to make sense, he allowed it must have been a bit of piety that had got into the wrong place when the monks were writing up their report.

All this was seven or eight hundred, or maybe a thousand, years ago. Where they parked the remains for the night they built a chapel, and some said that they buried the treasure in the chapel, though it wasn't clear why. Then they humped Botolph's fragments along to Bury St. Edmunds, leaving the treasure concealed, with a spell or something over it so that whenever anybody disturbed it a guardian would appear and warn them to let up.

This guardian took the form of a white nun, the "white lady" as she got to be called locally. But if people started digging after that treasure and took no notice of her warning,

she whistled up the Galley Trot, which was a great big dog, sorta demon dog, big like a bull, and sometimes it was white and sometimes it was black, but anyway you wouldn't care to stay around if it showed up. Its eyes were red. "Red as the precious blood of St. Botolph," was what Ainton read out from that Latin record.

Clovid had a theory that the Bath Slough had really been in his garden, and that the chapel and the hiding-place of the treasure were originally part of his house. There was a solid brick core to the house that had three big fireplaces in it ; one in the hall, one in the library, and one in the sitting-room where we were listening to this ghost hooey. Those flues went up through the house and took in the flues from the bedroom fireplaces.

The last time Dane had been down, before he went on his American trip, he and Clovid had measured up that brickwork, and had decided that there was far too much space in it for just those flues. Dane was wise to old houses and their builders' ways, and he allowed that there might be what he called a "priest hole" or some kind of secret hiding-place in that block of brickwork.

Clovid was questioned about the appearance of the Galley Trot. Ainton made a regular court case out of it and cross-examined him until we found that on the night of the appearance there had been a party in the house, and they had been doing spiritualist table-turning stunts.

"Ah," said Dane when he heard that, "you must have released a hidden evil force that couldn't get back again : dangerous things to tamper with."

"But marvellously shudder-making," said Miss Frond ; "I shall be quite sick with funk to-night. Is my bedroom a long way from the place where the Galley Trot appeared, George ?"

"It's at the other end of the house," said Clovid.

Dane seemed excited, and suddenly said : "You know

there's a wonderful story in this if anyone tried to tell it. I've half a mind to have a shot at it to-morrow night."

"I didn't know you wrote stories," said Lydia Clovid.

"Sometimes," said Dane, "it's an intellectual rest."

"You can't do it to-morrow night," said Lydia. "We're going to the movies at Oakbridge."

"Well, you'll go one short," said Dane. "I want to brood about this most of to-morrow, and I'll boil over and write it in the evening."

"Better write it in the library," said Lydia; "it's more creepy. You know that old cupboard that's by the side of the fireplace? Well, if I sit with my back towards that I always have a feeling that someone's looking over my shoulder."

"Sounds awfully commonplace," said Ainton. "This story has got all the right things in it: creepy cupboards, suspected buried treasure, saint's relics, the Hound of the Baskerville touch, plus a guardian nun—don't you think it's a little overcrowded with ghostly detail?"

I was thinking that too, but Clovid and Dane just wiped up the objection.

Next day was one of those sleepy winter days when all get the front part of themselves warm over a fire, and eat hearty and then let themselves out on exercise. Ainton and Saxel and Miss Frond went riding. We had dinner early on Saturday and then went in two parties to Oakbridge in Clovid's Rolls-Royce and Ainton's Ford. Dane was left behind in the library with his typewriter and lots of paper and a wood fire.

When we got back Lydia took the car round to the garage, and Mrs. Dane, Clovid and I got out.

"By Jove, how cold it is in here," said Clovid, as he opened the door. (It didn't seem any colder to me than an English house always is.) The other car drove up and Saxel and Miss Frond got out while Ainton followed Mrs. Clovid into the garage. We all went into the hall.

"I wonder if Oliver's finished his story," said Clovid, going to the library. The light was out, but he switched it on, and then yelled like something had bit him. We rushed after him and nearly got jammed in the door. Dane was lying on the floor, beside the table, his face up, partly covered with blood.

"My God!" said Saxel; and then Lydia and Ainton joined us. We put Dane on a sofa and sponged the blood off his face. There didn't seem to be any wounds, aside from a cut on his finger. We gave him whisky and he woke up, and if he wasn't scared, then he was putting on a good act. But he brisked up and said: "Well, George, there wasn't any need for me to finish the story—the Galley Trot did that for me. You get to work and have the back of that cupboard out. Remember those little trap-doors we found at the top of the chimney-piece which the architect had put in to make it easier to sweep the chimneys? Well, there's another one in the top of that cupboard, and I think something comes out of there and materialises when it's out. It's a dog—as big as a lion. No—I can't tell you if it's black or white: it's well—never mind. Seal that wall up or tear it down, George," said Dane, his voice climbing up high; "it's too hellish to let this thing go on."

He wouldn't spill any more.

It wasn't one of those respectable English house parties that one reads about where everybody goes to church on Sunday. No, sir. That party got busy next day. George Clovid and the gardener, and a handy-man they had who'd been in the Navy, and Dane, took down the panelling in the library after breakfast.

They hacked away the brickwork below that trap-door at the top of the cupboard. They only stopped for lunch. About three o'clock in the afternoon, when they'd got the library full of bricks and mortar and old wood and dust and cement, Ainton, who had been scrabbling about in the rubbish, says: "How's this for the treasure?"

And there, scattered among the broken bricks and the rubbish back of that cupboard were a lot of stones, covered lightly with dust.

When the dust was wiped off they shone like orange fire. "So that's what was meant by the blood of St. Botolph!" said Ainton. "That was something like treasure—rubies, aren't they?"

"They are," I told him.

"How does the law of treasure trove affect this?" asked Dane, after the stones had passed from hand to hand.

And then I did my stuff. "Gentlemen," I said, "if those stones are handed over to me, my clients will take no action against Mr. Dane, who brought them from America, and who may or may not be working on a share basis with somebody present. It was a big idea, putting the stones in that trap-door in the cupboard and letting 'em trickle down behind it. We'd a hunch our side that you were necking around with the jewel gang that gathered up old Abe Ziedel's world-famous collection of rubies, else you might have got away with your old-world treasure-hunt scene. We can't extradite you from your own country, Mr. Dane, but it'll be healthier for you to keep out of ours after this. I'll have those stones, please."

And I got them; *and* they behaved like nothing had happened, till I quit. English house parties are interesting, specially when a detective gets a close-up of one.

MICHAEL KENT

*Supper at Borgy's*





## SUPPER AT BORGY'S

**B**ENT ELM lay side by side with Look-and-Leap, two fine fat farms as you could wish to see. Tom Spender farmed Look-and-Leap and his younger brother, John, Bent Elm, and neighbourly enough the brothers were. As to their women folk, John's wife, Anne, was a simple kindly soul with never enough ill-will to tread on a dozy wasp. Borgy, they say, only married Tom for spite when, for all her comeliness and taking ways, his younger brother would have naught to do with her.

Pretty as a picture Borgy was ; she had been put in a picture, too. That was before she married. A painter chap, staying at the "Travellers' Joy," made a picture of her feeding with a mort of grand folk off gold and silver platters in a place so fine it might have been the tea-room of a great cinema, Borgy, dawn-bright and honey-sweet, handing her cup for a friend to drink from. "Supper at the Borgias" it was called, and that's how she come by the name of Borgy.

Forest gipsy was in her blood, and for all her father kept Nidderhurst school her mother had run barefoot beside the caravans. Wild blood will out, howsoever you tether it, and Borgy was tethered close enough. For the one dead child she brought her husband left her legs all dwindly, and she never walked again till that black day when she stood to flee from her iniquity, poor mortal soul.

In her chair she lived ever inside the house, looking after her maids as well as she might, and from her window maybe

hearing Anne singing at her work across the way, a sorry end to all her joys and junketings.

Yet she kept fair to see, with her white skin and coal-black hair and her dark-set golden eyes. One of God's saints she looked ; but sometimes at twilight before the lamps were lit, or coming quiet on her as she sat brooding, a man might find something in her eyes that struck cold in his innards, as if, going to pluck a primrose, he found an adder under the leaves.

She had Romany cunning to match Romany hate.

With Tom and John beside her, hearing Anne's step, she'd stretch a hand to each and draw them nigh. "Dear husband and dear brother," she'd say, "I'm a lucky woman, aren't I, Anne?"

Then she would glance under her long lashes to see if Anne were hurt with jealousy.

She could never forgive Anne for marrying the man she had tried so hard for herself, and Anne had given him two fine, sturdy lads.

Times there were when she would lie back limp on her cushions with lids closed and hands clasped, and if folk asked if she was in pain, "No," she would say, "praying a little."

And so she was, praying that God would give Anne sense enough to be hurt at the things she saw and heard.

Snake under blossom, wasp in plum, there's no other word for it.

All manner of things she believed in gipsy fashion, pixies and little people and voices and warnings and ghosts of folk dead and gone.

When first she came to Look-and-Leap she would set out to mar the things Anne had joy in by talking of them fit to make your flesh creep.

Once her sister-in-law brought a black kitten home to Bent Elm.

"God help my poor Anne," Borgy said. "A black cat new in the house on a Friday opens the door to the devil."

When, maybe, Anne was going a jaunt with John to the pictures at Winchester, she'd send a maid round to say she had dreamed Bent Elm was afire, and young Tom and his brother Jack looking out of an attic window.

Poor Anne would have no joy in the pictures, whether she trusted her sister's words or not, but she could never take in ill part things that seemed so kindly meant.

Yet some signs came to Borgy that she never made up, voices she heard as she sat alone in her parlour and things that folk of her sort have the gift to read. They say no one can tell their own future, however wise they are. Maybe if she had remembered that she would not have questioned so continually whether she would get her wish. For all day she questioned this way and that, but the birds that flew by and the leaves in her cup and the way the fire burned. "Let me but live to see John and Anne bowed in sorrow."

It isn't far from that to plotting murder.

But what was a woman to do who lived in a chair all day and was good for naught but making lace borders for Mr. Dee's communion napkins? When she had her powers she could have stirred up jealousy between Tom and John till they had fought, but there was little left in her to desire for all her cozening. Yet in her cunning brain she felt certain that a time would come when all things would fall as she could wish them, and she would slake all her bitterness with revenge.

Early she took to cleaning the men's guns, both Tom's and John's. They were glad to have her interested and occupied. But guns are for killing, though she did not see at first how they could be made to serve her will. In the same way she would have poisons within her reach, bidding her maids make posies of them from the hedges, nightshade berries and poppy and mandrake and hemlock, for she was minded that she was readier for her purpose with them than without.

It was second nature to her to try to drive a wedge between those two boys and their parents. She hardly knew that she was resolved on doing it, and very easy it seemed.

Jack, who was rising six, she got with tales of the pixies, the little people she had seen dancing in the moonlight. Tomsie she could always draw to help her when she was oiling the guns. Beyond a doubt, they grew mortal fond of their Aunt Borgy.

Yet, all said and done, the little fellow curling up just afore bed-time on Anne's warm lap, or Tomsie, talking terrible old and wise to his father about putting the spud plough unto Upper Deacon stubble if the rain held off, knew where their hearts were set, though neither John nor Anne were after them with "dears" and "darlings."

Then, bit by bit, it came to Borgy how the stars were working for her to bring her her desire. It's past divining how she came to piece it all together, but sitting in her chair by the parlour window, talking of fairies to little Jack, she had naught else to think about.

Like any youngster, he believed it all.

"Aunt Borgy," he asked one day, "have you ever seen the pharisees?" calling them by another name as she had taught him, because it offends the little people to hear their name aloud.

"Seen them, Jackie," said she, "seen and talked to them in the woods when I wasn't as old as you."

Then he would listen with his mouth open, pop-eyed as a wagoner at the horsemanship while the ladies on the horses jump through the paper hoops, as she told him how the little people made dark rings in the meadow grass for dancing, the biggest of them being no bigger than a pig's tail, and how, when she was a girl and went by moonlight in the forest, they used to call to her.

"I can see 'ee,  
But 'ee can't see me,

And as 'ee serve me  
So I'll serve 'ee,  
Evil or good, whatever it be,  
Thirty and forty and fifty times three."

Her head was full of such rubbish, and the child took to it like a duck to water, singing her queer songs wherever he went.

"Do you see them now, Auntie?" he asked. "'Cos you could interjuice me."

"Bless the mite, yes," she answered, for his head was curled under her arm and against her breast, and maybe there was bitter rage in her heart that this child of Tom's was Anne's instead of hers. "That big old white stone under the hollyhocks out there, that's the door they come out of to dance, and the toad that sits by it, he's their doorkeeper and he comes out 'twixt sundown and dark, all dressed up in green and gold, to keep the door for them like a man at the picture house. Out they come a-dancing like leaves in a whirlwind."

A precious rigmarole for sure, but gospel true to Jackie.

"Some day," said she, "when they're coming, I'll whistle and you can creep up behind the stone and watch, but don't you tell a living soul or they'll come at night and pinch you black and blue."

The plan was to be their secret. Jackie dursten't say a word, but every evening, as summer passed, he went into Look-and-Leap garden to listen for his auntie's whistle.

Then came the evening when Borgy sat up in the window with Tom's gun across her knees and John's in the corner of the bay, while Tomsie, home from school, waited terrier-keen to help her.

He watched her break the breech and drop the cartridges out on her lap.

"Coo, Aunt Bor," said he, "can I do that?"

She'd counted on that, for she was mortal quick to know the hearts of men and boys.

"Wait till they're both cleaned," she said, "then I'll show you how to load and unload. Where's Jackie?"

"Out in the garden," said Tomsie, "playing by himself."

"He's mother's pet, isn't he, Tomsie?" she asked.

"I don't know," said the boy. "She has to look after him more. He's littler than me, you see."

So, together, with ramrod and oil and rag, they cleaned and polished the two guns, for she had to wait for dusk.

"And if you help me nicely," she said, "I'll show you how to aim and fire it."

"But I can't hold it out straight," he said. "It's too heavy."

"We'll see about that," she answered.

When they cleaned the guns together he was for ever clicking the triggers or setting his cheek to the stock to squint along the barrels, as a lad will do.

The light began to grow dim and she showed him the breech spring and loaded so that he could see the ejector draw the cartridges out like corks when the breech was opened.

She made him do it often both with his father's gun and his uncle's, whether the guns were loaded or unloaded, so in the end he hardly knew.

"You'll be a regular sportsman some day, Tomsie," she told him silkily. "Won't you be proud over your first hit?"

In her heart she was singing, for now what she had given all her arts and wit to bring about was nigh at hand. She thought of Anne with her two lads and her loving husband, whom she still madly desired and hated her, hated her.

"Here's a cushion," said she. "Put it on the window-sill and lay your daddy's gun on it. Aim at the hollyhock. I'll lean down and tell you if it's straight."

Then while the boy obeyed she whistled Jackie's signal, for as Tomsie had been busy with his uncle's gun she had slipped a live cartridge into his father's left barrel.

Behind the big-leaved hollyhock, not three yards from

the window, was the white stone, and between the flower and the stone, Jackie would wait for the fairies.

"Is the hollyhock waving?" she asked.

"Yes," said Tomsie, "it's blowing like the wind has caught it."

Her low voice buzzed like a blizzard wind that streams through naked twigs.

"Wait till it's still," said she.

"It's still now, auntie," the boy said.

She smiled, though her skin that was so pale shone silvery.

Leaning down she looked along the barrel. "It's lovely and straight, my dear."

She knew he could not help but press the trigger. Any boy would.

The bang rattled and shattered through the farm buildings. The kick of the gun knocked the boy back, and a couple of maids came running in to see what had happened.

"Why, Tomsie, darling," asked Borgy, "however did you come to put a live cartridge in? Have you hurt yourself, my dear?"

No one thought of anything else. What harm would a charge of shot do in a garden?

"'Tis a mercy," said a maid, "that Master Tom did let it off. Suppose he'd taken it home loaded and no one never the wiser! He might have killed someone."

"Yes, Tomsie," said his aunt, "just think of that!"

As for Tomsie himself he would have scorned to own he hurt himself. Secretly, he was as proud as a mare with her first foal to have fired his father's gun, though how a live cartridge came to be left in it he couldn't say.

And when he was gone Borgy savoured her triumph.

What had been done would leave a mark on Anne's heart if she lived to be a hundred. John's head would bend beneath it, ah! It would bring grey hairs to him, too.

She sat there in the half-light while they laid supper in the next room and her heart beat fit to choke her. Ah, helpless her body might be, but her brain was a match for them all!

Then through her flesh there ran a chill. Never again would Jackie cuddle up to her to hear about the fairies. If Jackie had been her own she could hardly have loved him more. She knew that now, but before, her unslaked hatred of Anne had dwarfed all her other feelings. So now she lay back in the dark with her hands over her eyes, while sorrow and triumph tore at her like hounds, and her heart seethed like molten lead in a crucible, creaming with dross and smoke and dull red points of hate, yet cracking here and there in veins of silver a-top.

It seemed so strange to her. There was Tom and John and all their people in the stack-yard, for they were carrying corn, and Anne in her dairy, and not one of them knew that little Jackie lay behind the hollyhock with his head, maybe, in shreds. No one knew. They'd never think to look till supper-time came and he never turned up.

Then she began singing an old song softly to herself to quiet the pain in her heart.

“Your eyes were blue and your hair as gold  
As mortal e'er did see,  
But lie you warm or lie you cold,  
You'll lie no more by me.  
For dear as you have been, my dear,  
You never were my own. . . .”

It was about a boy who had loved his lass and killed her, and she sang it fitfully because it caught her breath and set the pulses leaping in her throat.

Then Elizabeth at the door calling to supper.

Anne came across from Bent Elm, and Borgy grew cold and calm, waiting for her triumph. It was her day of reckoning. Anne had bewitched John away from her. She herself had tricked Jacky away from Anne. They were quits.



Tom carried her to the table, and they all sat down while Borgy said grace.

Then John said: "Where's young Jack?" for the high chair next his own was empty. "Don't he want his victuals?"

"Reckon he's gone up Slithergate to pick some berries for Aunt Borgy, dad," said Tomsie. "That's what he reckoned to do."

"The angel," drawled Borgy. "Isn't he an angel, Anne?"

Anne knew there was falseness in her voice, but couldn't fathom why.

"He'll come in when he's hungry," said Anne. "I should think you're glad to be quit of him, Borgy; he regular haunts you."

"Haunts me!" said Borgy, and the stick of celery in her fingers cracked across sharp. "Don't talk of hauntings. It's unchancey."

For on a sudden the quick eye inside her brain showed him huddled up with the dew on him and maybe spiders a-crawl over him, and that red splotch where the bunched shot . . . In her mind she saw it clear as day.

She gave a cry and put her hand before her face and the menfolk, seeing that one of her odd fits were on her, began to tell of the day's work and its simple jokes.

It was pleasant in the golden yellow light of the lamp with the men, all bronzed and bearded, merry with the day's work done, near as good a picture as what that painter did.

Only Borgy sat sick with the thought of the dead boy under the hollyhock.

Then of a sudden all fell quiet as sometimes folk will, and then out of the dark of the kitchen passage, where no lamp shone, there came a thin, wispy voice like the piping of chicks under a hen.

"I can see 'ee,  
But 'ee can't see me."

"Dear heart afire," whispered Borgy, and her hands went to her throat.

"And what 'ee serve me  
That I'll serve 'ee."

"Don't let him come near. Don't let him near," shrilled Borgy.

"Evil or good whatever it be,  
Thirty and forty and fifty times three."

For a second even the men were dumbstruck and mazed, for as they turned to see what Borgy stared at down the dark passage they saw the shape of a little boy with crimson blotching his hands, which were raised in air, but above the white of his collar they saw nothing but the black of the passage as he walked slowly to the door of their room.

For maybe ten seconds all were frozen, and then Borgy cried with a voice none forgot who heard it :

"Christ ! It's come for me."

Then, springing from her chair, she, who had not stood for nigh five years, took one step towards the window and fell, and as they ran to her the little chap, now in the room, pulled off the black handkerchief he had tied over his head and ran towards her with a bunch of red berries.

"Look, Aunt Borgy," he cried, "I'm a fairy and I've brought the berries you're so set on."

But Anne took him aside.

"Aunt Borgy's feeling poorly," said she. "Run home, Jackie, and tell Helen to give you some supper. You, too, Tomsie. Dad and I are coming soon."

But it was some little time afore they came, and when they did and Jackie asked about his auntie, "She's gone back to the fairies, son," said Anne. "You won't see her more."

They never knew what killed her, not knew as you might say. But that's how I reckon to piece it together, and I knew her better than most, poor lost soul. 'Twere just the love gone sick in her. God pity her.

ERIC BENNETT

*Postscript*



## POSTSCRIPT

THE troops marched in silence under the sullen sky. Here and there a man whistled, but the cold and the damp had eaten into their spirits as well as their bodies until they were as sullen as the grey and miserable weather. But they marched well. There was no slackening of discipline, no raggedness, as the column swung along the steeply-rising track to a green, bare hill.

At the top of the hill they were halted. From the bald summit of the South Downs they could now see the beauty and the danger of this remote island which they had invaded. Before them stretched mile after mile of dense wealden forest, hiding, as they knew, the fierce and efficient fighting-men of a dozen barbarous tribes. Behind them the green downs sloped to more belts of scrub and woodland, and beyond lay the sea. Not the warm, blue sea of their own land, but the grey, cold northern sea, lapping beneath a leaden sky. The Roman legionaries stared dismally at the forest before them; but it was not the ambushed enemy that struck the chill into their hearts; it was the weather.

The order was given to make camp, and the men fell out, glad to forget their misery in performing familiar tasks. Rapidly they set to work, marking out the square according to regulations, throwing up the earthworks, setting up the usual offices: every man had his job, and every job had its place, and the routine took the minds of the soldiers off their situation, while the work warmed them. Soon they

were talking, joking, whistling, laughing, swearing—normal again.

Quintus Capena, the tribune, watched his company working in silence. No amount of military discipline or routine could be anodyne to him. He was sick and weary of marching and fighting, of camps and soldiers, of strange, wet countries and glowering skies. Soldiering was a sport for those who liked it. Caesar actually seemed to enjoy it. But why on earth he had ever joined this circus he . . . of course, he knew why he had come ; but the knowledge only made the experience more bitter.

"Carry on, centurion," he said to the senior non-commissioned officer when the earthwork was well under construction, and then strolled over to the headquarters' tent. It was empty save for the quartermaster, Gaius Valerius Cotta, who was checking some returns. Cotta was a hardy old campaigner who had seen service on all fronts ; he was one of the most efficient officers in the Gallic Command, and he had the strength of an ox, the digestion of an ostrich, and the humour of a schoolboy. Capena alternately liked and detested him.

Capena flung himself on a couch and turned his face to the tent-wall.

"What's the matter?" grunted Cotta, without looking up from his tablets.

"Nothing."

"Liver. That's what it is. Haven't marched far enough to-day. If I were you . . ."

"Oh, shut up."

Cotta, absorbed in his work, shut up. When at last he had finished, he leaned back in his chair and looked at the still figure of Capena on the couch. The quartermaster picked his teeth with a quill and spoke ruminatingly.

"Shouldn't be surprised if we get some rain to-night."

Capena sat up suddenly.

"Oh, this damnable weather. It'll drive me mad," he cried.

Cotta chuckled.

"And it's only their summer," he murmured. "God knows what's it's like in the winter." He changed his tone suddenly. "Pull yourself together, Quintus. Once you let the weather get on your nerves you're finished. I've seen the same thing out East, in Asia Minor. Forget about the blue skies and the lights of Rome, and never think further ahead than the next meal is my motto, and it's the only thing that has kept me sane."

He shook the dice box.

"Care for a game?"

Capena shook his head.

"Well, for the love of Jove, don't look so miserable. This show will be over in a month, and then we'll be back in Gaul. Once we're in winter quarters you'll be able to get leave. You never ought to have come on service, old man, your heart's not in it. Soldiering was only meant for tough 'uns like me. Why the devil you ever left Rome and your poetry . . ."

He broke off at the sight of the other's expression, and at the look in Capena's face the old soldier became the model of delicacy. He rose quietly from his chair and strolled to the opening of the tent, saying the while in a loud voice: "That damned fool Labo has made a mess of his grain returns again. I'd better go and see him. Why these blasted centurions can't do their jobs properly . . ."

His voice faded as he disappeared through the flap.

Capena relaxed again on the couch. Poor old Cotta; he meant well: decent old stick really: perfect fool, of course. Typical army man. But it was no good getting angry with Cotta, because Cotta was right. He had no

business in the army. And it was only romantic tomfoolery that had put him there. Just because he had fallen in love with a silly girl, who had despised him for being a poet instead of a man of action, and he had thought he would show off to her. . . .

He had been a poet. The finest writer of love lyrics in Rome : he knew that himself, not merely because all the best critics said so. He knew it, because he felt it inside him. He had lived a pleasant life. He had mixed with the most cultured, the most intelligent, and the most charming people in Rome. His contemporaries acclaimed him as a genius, his betters as a friend. Each year brought greater achievement, greater success. Capena, the poet, had had all that life could offer.

Then he made the fatal mistake for a writer of love poems : he had fallen in love. The new passion that inflamed his verse and won him still greater applause, devoured his life. And the girl despised him for being a poet, for being a mere literary man. The man she would love, she told him, would be a man of strength, a fighter, a hero.

Love makes strange fools of men. Quintus Capena took the girl at her word and accepted the challenge : he thought he could fight a way to her love. He abandoned everything that he had lived for. He left his poetry, his books, his friends, the comfort of his villa, and went north to take a commission under Cæsar. He spent eighteen months in Gaul, hating every minute of it.

Whenever he had a spare moment, he spent it in writing, not poems, but long letters and chronicles to the girl in Rome. The post was slow, and answers were few and long in coming. But just before the start of the British invasion he had received a letter from a friend in Rome : it told him that the girl had married. She had married a man named Lævus, a third-rate playwright.



Yes, Cotta was right. That was why he had got angry with him, of course. He had been a fool to do what he had so often written against—to let a woman ruin his life. His life had finished on the day he left Rome.

Funny to think of the man whom Rome had hailed as its greatest poet moping in a tent on the outskirts of the world as a very inefficient junior officer. Poetry. He hadn't written a line since he had left Rome. Wonder if he could now . . . an elegy . . . yes, an ode to the wife of a third-rate dramatist . . . a threnody of love.

He jumped up from the couch and looked round the tent for a tablet. There were only Cotta's accounts, and he dare not erase them from the wax. Ah! There was half a broken wine-jar . . . that would do.

He lit the lamp on the table. The grey clouds were drawing in and it was getting dark. And then, crouching by the light, with the great potsherd on his lap, he began scratching down his poem. A new light shone in his eyes, he even smiled as phrases and verses leaped to his mind to be transcribed laboriously on the pottery. Capena was happy for the first time in months. He could do it! He could still write . . . and as he read over the first completed stanza he grinned with satisfaction. This poem, saturated with the bitterness of the last two years, yet lilting with his old familiar touch, was the greatest thing he had done. Capena, the poet, was satisfied. He bent again to his task, scratching jewels on to a broken jar.

There was a sudden blare of bugles.

An alarm. Stand to positions. They were attacked. Capena flung down the potsherd and ran from the tent. Half-naked men brandishing long spears were swarming the unfinished ramparts, and hurling themselves upon the Romans, who had hastily formed to meet the assault.

Capena ran to his company, trying to gauge how the

fight was going there in the half-darkness. But before he could reach the rampart a heavy javelin hurtled through the air and pierced his unarmoured throat. Capena was dead before his body hit the earth.

“The works of Quintus Cornelius Capena contain gems of lyric poetry which have not been surpassed in any language. The profundity of his sentiments, the beauty of his images, the lucidity of his expression, and the ease of his liquid verse, have combined to make him the greatest—and by common consent he is acknowledged to be the greatest—of the ancient poets.

“Little is known of his life. He was born in the first half of the first century B.C., and came of good family. His genius manifested itself in his youth, and by 60 B.C., when Capena was about twenty-five years of age, he was at the height of his fame. Five years later he seems to have left Rome, and there is no further record of him. Cæsar mentions a Q. Capena in his Commentaries, but it is unlikely that the passage refers to the poet, while the tradition that Capena died in Britain may, with most other Romano-British legends, safely be disregarded.

“Capena’s fame rests entirely on thirty-four poems, which were discovered in a much-mutilated manuscript of the twelfth century, and scholars still live in the hope that the world will one day be enriched and delighted by—if not the complete collection—further poems or even fragments. In considering the text of Capena . . .”

At this point Professor Madelane stopped writing and went in to lunch.

“How’s the great opus?” asked Dr. Finch, his son-in-law.

“Splendid, my boy. Going strong. I’m just at work on the preface now. What’s this? Roast duck? Ah, beautiful.

Do you know, Henry, if only I could get one new fragment, just a part, even, of an undiscovered poem by Capena, I should die a happy man. I've done my best for the existing text, of course. But if Quintilian was right, there must be over three hundred missing poems. Somewhere there must be manuscripts or transcriptions. I've scoured Italy myself, and apart from the Codex . . ."

Dr. Finch interrupted before the Professor got well into his favourite subject.

"But if you did find a poem . . . I mean a fragment, how could you be certain that it was one of Capena's?"

"My dear boy!" The Professor was hurt. "How do you diagnose a disease? Exactly. I could tell the authentic stamp of Capena from the fragment of a couple of verses. Why, when I was working on the text of Propertius . . ."

"Mr. Marrible to see you, sir," announced the servant.

"Show him in," cried the Professor. "Come in, my dear Marrible. This is my son-in-law, Dr. Finch, Mr. Marrible. Mr. Marrible is in charge of the excavations up at Charbury Camp. How are things going there?"

"Excellently," answered the archæologist. "In fact, I've brought you a find that might interest you."

From beneath his mackintosh he pulled out a paper parcel the size of a dinner plate and handed it to the Professor. Professor Madelane pulled off the wrapping and looked upon a large piece of earthenware.

"H'm. Part of an amphora; large wine-jar. Oh, I see. An inscription."

He adjusted his glasses and examined the scratches made by the greatest of Roman poets in the last hour of his life. Then pulling out a fountain-pen, he made a transcription on the tablecloth.

"Ha! There we are, Marrible. Quite a neat bit of verse for a soldier: probably written by a more or less educated

centurion to his girl. Interesting little human sidelight, what?"

"I thought, perhaps, that as a poem . . ." began Marrible, who was a mere sixth-form master.

"Come, come," laughed the Professor. "As a poem it's about as good and significant as 'The Girl I Left Behind Me.' By the way, have you had any lunch?"

ALBERT HALPER

*Going to Market*



## GOING TO MARKET

THE little nag stands between the old worn shafts and bows her small meek head. She stands there with her shaggy fetlocks quiet, her hooves firm against the pavement of the street, while her uncut tail swings smartly at the pesty flies. One-two. She whacks them hard.

At the kerb, all hot and bothered, stands the grocer's little son, his eyes drilling holes into the lines of the small grey horse.

"I'm going to market," he says aloud, "I'm going along to-day," and he sparkles as he speaks. Eight years old, well-knit and sturdy, he almost dances in his tracks.

Behind him, inside the small grocery, his father and older brother scan the shelves to see what stock is running low. The older brother, sixteen, soft down on his cheeks, given over to occasional dreaming, calls off the items while his father writes them down on the back of a paper bag, wiggling a two-inch stub of pencil.

"How long will you be gone?" asks the wife, who has to mind the store.

Her husband grunts. He hitches up his pants, scowls at his pencil, and, from under heavy brows, says: "One hour, two hours—well, let's be going."

Father and son stalk out.

"Hi, Dave, making eyes at Bubba again?" says the older brother, teasing him.

The small boy stares humbly, imploringly at his father.

With a grunt, the stocky little grocer swings up on the seat and his older son eases up after him. At the curb the small kid begins gulping.

"You said you'd . . ." and he starts to bawl.

The older brother, on the seat now, grins. The father, picking up the reins, thinking about the stock marked down on the paper bag, mutters: "All right, get on behind, hurry up."

Dave climbs nimbly on to the rear, and his shoes make a clatter against the dry splintered boards of the floor of the little wagon. His father looks behind, sees the boy is all right, then jerks at the reins. The small wagon swings to the right, the wheels head for the steel car tracks, wed themselves silently to the rails, and the nag jogs on.

The cart goes eastward on Lake Street, passing underneath the gloomy Elevated structure. From above, the morning sunshine pours itself through the spaced ties in blocks of harsh light. The rails narrow far ahead. The grocer, thinking about competition from chain-stores, hoping that none of them will find a vacancy and move into the block where his own store is, slaps the reins against the nag's rump, and for a few yards she perks up, then jogs along at the same old pace again. Milt, the older brother, swinging a long leg idly, caresses the down on his cheek and wonders if he should start shaving pretty soon.

At Morgan Street the grocer gives a sharp tug at one rein, and the nag swings to the right, heading for the big Randolph Street market. Backed up along the curbs of the side-streets are trucks and wagons, and the sidewalks are piled high with all kinds of crated merchandise, also fruits and vegetables. Dave, his little legs going hard, his eyes alive, takes in everything, sniffing at the smoked meats of the wholesalers, wrinkling up his nose at the strong smell of fish. There are hollows in the street, and the wagon rocks and sways like a seining smack. Dave grips the back of the seat more firmly and holds on.



On Randolph Street, near Halsted, the grocer spies an empty place, shouts at the nag suddenly and backs in, jerking hard at the reins. Terrified, the little mare rears her fore hooves, prances like a race-horse, then goes quiet. Her mouth bleeds slightly near the bit. Pretty soon the cart is fitted in snugly.

The older son and the grocer swing down from the wagon and, with "You mind the wagon till we come back," the eight-year-old boy is left alone. Watching his father and brother pick their way through the jammed sidewalk, around crates of plums, grapes, melons, asparagus and peaches, straight from the heart of Michigan, a strange fright at being left alone in all this noise and confusion pounds at his little heart, and he feels like screaming at them to take him along, when he suddenly remembers that this is his first trip, and if he pesters them they will not take him again. His face grows calm, but his heart continues to hammer a bit.

As far as the eyes can see is the bustling market. The street is wide here, about a hundred and fifty feet from kerb to kerb. In the centre, where no traffic flows, stand the big trucks and wagons of the prairie farmers.

For fifteen minutes Dave, silent on the seat, looked up and down, growing calmer. Wagons backed in and drove off after loading and unloading, arguments sprang up on the sidewalk concerning prices and the weight, while on all sides truckers wheeling loads in and out of the wholesalers swore at one another for the right of way. The truckers were big fellows with caps snug against their skulls, but some of them, seeing Dave alone on the seat, had time to shout: "Hello, kid, how's the weather up there on the wagon?"

Dave grinned weakly and started squirming on the seat, hoping his father and older brother would return pretty soon. A hot breeze blowing up the street brought the thick, sweetish smell of grapes toward him, and looking to the left he saw,

under a wide awning, a great load of crated California blue grapes, packed so full the boards of the boxes bulged. Three truckers, two of them white, the third a negro, all three big strapping fellows, were moving the crates inside the store.

The three men worked in silence. On the wide sidewalk the crates stood stacked in a great square pile ten feet high, and ever so often a fat little boss came out, gripping a fistful of bills and shipping tickets, frowning up and down the street as if searching for something, but in reality he had come out to see if the boys were stalling, if they were working fast enough. Pretty soon he did not come out any more.

Sitting high on the wagon seat, Dave saw that the two white truckers helped each other with their loading, while the coloured man had to reach up at the pile and load his own truck alone, holding the handle of the truck firmly between his knees as he reached up with his arms. When the boss did not come out again Dave noticed also that every once in a while one of the white fellows, coming out of the store, would maliciously roll the small iron wheels of his hand-truck near the negro's foot, nipping the toes of the black man's shoes. The negro, his face heavy and thoughtful, worked in silence, glancing submissively down at the sidewalk. Trouble had been brewing between himself and the two white truckers or over a week.

Later on, when the wheels of one of the white truckers came too close, rolling over the entire left toe, the negro gave an ugly murmur, and his grip tightened upon the handles of his own truck ; he still stared down at the sidewalk as he shoved a load inside the dark, shady store, but submission did not show on his face.

The two whites, rolling their loads after him, grinned toward the boy on the wagon seat and, when they stared at the nigger, went : "Haw, haw, haw."

The coloured man came outside a minute later with his

empty truck, his face still heavy but sullenly thoughtful, and looked up the bustling street. He looked toward the east. At the next corner, about a hundred feet away, a cop on horseback was trying to settle an argument with a wholesaler who claimed the farmer who had just sold him a load of berries had cheated on the deal. A small crowd gathered.

Up the street the cop sat his mount solidly, as if in the saddle of a motor-cycle, and scratched his jaw. The wholesaler pulled out a pencil, started scribbling and quoted facts and figures to prove his point, while the farmer, a lean, tall man in faded overalls, unshaven, hollow-eyed, stood by grim and silent.

Dave sat on the wagon and his eyes were glued on the commotion at the corner.

Pretty soon the white truckers coming from the store and seeing the negro standing quiet, yelled at the fellow to get going to get a move on. "Come on, you big black —, we're not doing your work for you," and one of them skimmed his truck by quickly. The nigger drew his toes in just in time, his nostrils dilating until the swelling holes of his nose resembled the dark threatening bores of a double-barrelled shotgun.

In silence all three loaded up and rolled another haul of crates inside. Dave, who took turns watching the argument up the street, and the two whites against the nigger, started feeling nervous, and longed for his father and older brother to come back. He told himself he'd never come to market again.

The bustle and the brutality of it, the jam of wagons, trucks, and yelling hustlers struck him like an ice-cold wave of lake water, and he shivered inwardly. He sat there with his little body growing hard and firm as he saw the three truckers coming from the store again, the two whites following the negro, hard on the negro's heels as if grimly trailing the fellow.

Up the street the argument at the corner was growing in heat, and torn between the two, Dave gripped the iron ends of the wagon seat tightly.

By this time the sidewalk up and down the block was dead empty ; wholesalers and truckers had gone toward the corner, where the argument was rising to an intense and bitter pitch. At the side of the cop's horse the farmer, against them all, said nothing, occasionally feeling his rear overall pocket. He had been paid off already for the load, and he meant to keep the money.

Then Dave, looking back at the two whites and the nigger, who went on working without paying any attention to the squabble at the corner, sat more rigid than ever. He saw one of the truckers dart next door, behind the nigger's back, and snatch up a long knife from the counter there. The store was a wholesale cheese company, and the long knife was used for halving the big thirty and forty pound cheeses. The trucker slipped the knife into his shirt while his partner nodded curtly. the broad back of the nigger, straining, was toward them.

The rest happened so quickly that the boy on the seat was confused by the action of it.

Just as the nigger was passing under the shade of the awning the two white truckers looked quickly at each other, then one sprang forward at the nigger's back ; the knife-flash that followed was dull because of the shade under the awning.

But Dave heard the groan and the sob, saw the big negro fall softly, heavily forward. One of the truckers started whistling suddenly and went quickly out upon the sidewalk to see if the argument up the street was still in progress. He came back and nodded to his partner.

Under the shade of the awning, stretched out to his full length, the negro lay quiet. He lay face down against the sidewalk, his nose flattened against the grey cement. Wiping the blade neatly and thoroughly against the fallen man's back,

the trucker who had done the stabbing cleaned the blade, darted next door, placed the knife on the counter, and then came back.

Both truckers started whistling a quick tune, flatly.

On the wagon-seat the small boy, his eyes popping from his head, was breathing hoarsely. He was conscious that the argument up the street was still going strong, but his eyes were glued on the negro's broad, quiet back, in a blotch of red which was spreading slowly, staining the centre of the man's shirt.

The two truckers, still whistling, loaded up again and rolled eight crates apiece inside the store. The doorway was very wide, with a two-inch stair in front of it, and they had to grunt a bit as they forced the wheels over the obstacle. When they came out again for another haul they looked sharply up and down the street; one broke open a crate, pulled out a bunch of grapes, and, bending down, jammed the bunch against the nigger's back.

The grapes, bursting, spurted red juice all over the fallen man's shirt. They rolled him over, so that his face stared at the sky, and one of them took another bunch of grapes from the opened crate and placed it right under the nigger's back. They laid the crate nearby on the sidewalk. Then they folded the fellow's hands on his chest, propped the limp head upon the low stair near the doorway, as if he were asleep, and loaded up again, whistling briskly.

Dave started shivering. He looked at the calm brown face of the prone negro. The big fellow, stretched out, appeared to be sleeping. But the broad chest did not rise and fall.

At the next load the two truckers, coming from the shady darkness of the store, strode to the corner to listen to the wrangle there, and remained in the crowd until a settlement was reached. In the end, his face sagging, the farmer had to give part of his money back. The cop felt relieved, the wholesaler started looking genial, and the small crowd broke.

Then someone saw the nigger on the sidewalk—sleeping when there was such a big load yet to be taken inside the store. All at once laughter rippled the street, a release from the harsh tension of the squabble just settled. Someone nudged the prone figure with the tip of his boot.

In the big half-circle wholesalers and truckers stood about chuckling and joking.

“Niggers, they can sleep if hell is freezing.”

At the corner up the street the two truckers detailed with the negro to haul in the crated grapes were talking genially to the cop on horseback about the wrangle, getting the lowdown on the deal. “So the hick had to give Kuntz twenty dollars back, so he had to hand it over, eh? Haw, haw, haw.” Their big, yellow teeth were bared in a grin at the cop. The cop grinned back, clucked his tongue at his horse, and started going up the street. The truckers stood awhile, pale around the mouth, not looking at each other. Then they went back to the job.

The semi-circle was still there. The two started working, breaking through the crowd, loading seriously.

Then someone bent down.

“He’s not sleeping.”

The crowd went quiet.

They rolled him over. On the sidewalk was the red mashy juice of grapes, with slimy seeds sticking to the pavement. They felt his pulse.

“Call a doctor!”

The cry shot up the bustling street.

The crowd pressed forward, milling, curious. Down the street the cop on horseback, turning in the saddle, saw the new group bunched together and, thinking another argument was springing up, jerked at the reins and galloped up to the scene.

“Look, he must have tripped over that opened crate and

killed himself. He fell right on the box ; you can see the grapes sticking to his shirt."

Then someone, a little more curious than the others, felt around exploringly until his fingers came in contact with a clean slit in the shirt ; and on his palm as he drew his hand away, was a sticky liquid darker than the juice from the grapes.

"He's been knifed !"

The cop got off the saddle and took charge of the situation.

"It may have been a nail from the box," he said.

All of them stared down at the calm-faced dead nigger. Then the cop, raising his head, turning it sharply like a proud horse, looked about.

"Say, you," he yelled at Dave on the wagon seat, "did you see anything happen around here ?"

The two truckers started whistling their tune louder than ever and turned their stares towards the kid on the wagon, frowning, boring him with their gaze.

Dave started bawling.

"He's only a kid, he don't know anything," someone said.

The truckers whistled softly.

Five minutes later the police ambulance arrived and the body was carried away. The crowd broke again, and after a haul, one of the truckers went inside for a bucket of water and sloshed it against the sidewalk.

A boss came out irritated, and waved his fistful of shipping tickets at the two truckers, bawling them out, telling them he was a man short now. "Snap out of it," he said savagely, and went inside again. The truckers, silent, not looking at each other, began working so hard that they started sweating. One of them almost slipped on the purplish wet of the sidewalk, and the other sprang forward to catch him.

Five minutes later, when the grocer and his elder son returned, they found Dave unnerved and whimpering,

nervously biting his nails. The stocky little grocer, getting on the wagon, attacked his son with questions, wanted to know what was wrong, what was the matter ; but the boy only bawled the harder. At the curb the two truckers, whirling around, wet their lips and whistled toward the wagon seat, frowning and drilling with their stares.

The grocer jerked at the reins. He had done all his ordering, and now was going from wholesaler to wholesaler to pick up the goods. As the wagon swung out from the parked trucks he turned impatiently on the boy and once more demanded to know what was the matter.

"I saw—you were gone so long," the boy said, digging his little fist into his eyes. "You left me all alone."

"Oh, is that all?" grunted the grocer, and guided the horse toward the first stop. "

"But you had Bubba with you," teased the older brother.

Dave started bawling harder than ever. The grocer couldn't understand it.

At the last stop in a side-street they took on three crates of Californian grapes. When the boxes were on the wagon the older brother, digging with his fingers, pried a few grapes loose between the thin slats of the crate and offered some to Dave, the red juice of the first berries on his lips.

Dave saw the stain on his older brother's face and suddenly began screaming.

"You keep quiet!" the grocer shouted to the boy. "Keep quiet or I'll box your ears! This is the last time you come along!"

The wagon struck Lake Street and the nag headed west, going under the Elevated.

"You ought to be ashamed," mumbled the grocer, patting the boy's head, one hand holding the reins.

Dave swallowed hard and gulped down the sobbing, and as the cart rolled back toward the store he felt the summer



wind rushing toward his face, and with his fingers he felt his tear-stained, sticky cheeks.

"You were gone so long," he said again, this time softly. "I had to sit there all by myself."

Then, craning his neck over the side of the seat he watched the twinkling hooves of the little nag hammering the cobbles between the Lake Street car tracks.



ERSKINE CALDWELL

*The First Autumn*



## THE FIRST AUTUMN

THEY sat on the lawn looking up at the fluttering leaves on the old maples. He was beside the wagon with his arm over the red wooden body ; she was on the other side, sitting with her legs crossed under her and with her hands folded in her lap.

"That is the oldest tree over there," Elizabeth said, pointing across the lawn. "I know it's the oldest, because it's the one where the squirrels live."

"But that's not why it is the oldest, silly," Robert said. "It's the oldest because the leaves stay green the longest. The little trees turn red first."

A week ago all the trees were as green as the newly mown lawn, and then all of a sudden they had begun to turn. The grove of maples on the hill was orange and gold, the younger trees were the deeper colour, and in the yard the old maples that had been there scores of years were turning yellow and purple. In a short while the leaves would begin to twirl and spin on the branches when the breeze blew, and then they would twist themselves off and come fluttering down. After that the grass would die, the flowers would shrivel, and the hills and fields would be a deep dark brown until the first snow fell.

"The sky was raining paint last night while we slept," Elizabeth said. "It rained a pot of paint on every tree."

"Daddy says it is the end of summer. He said that the trees turn into bright colours every year, when summer is over."

"I didn't see it last year."

"But Daddy said that last year all the trees were coloured. They were yellow for a while, and then all of them were red. When the leaves turn red, that's when they are ready to fall almost any minute. That's because they are dead."

The front door opened. Robert dropped the wagon tongue and ran to the porch.

"Here's Daddy! Here's Daddy! Daddy's come out to play!"

Elizabeth ran after him. They clambered up the porch steps as fast as they could.

"Now what?" Daddy said.

"Play!" Robert said, jumping up and down, swinging on his arm. "We're going to play!"

"Is this the end of the week, Daddy?" Elizabeth asked. "Are you going to stay two whole days now?"

"It's the end of the week. No more city for two whole days."

"Let's play," Robert said, pulling him down the steps. "Let's play everything!"

"We are tired of playing bear, aren't we?" Daddy said. "We played bear last week-end. What'll we play this week?"

"Bear!" Robert said. "Let's play bear again. It's much more fun than anything else."

"I've just thought of a new game to play," Daddy said. "How would you like to play horse, Robert?"

"Oh, let's play bear first of all," Elizabeth said, pulling him across the lawn. "Just for a little while, Daddy, and then we can play all the other games."

"All right, then," Daddy said. "Who's going to be the great big black bear this time?"

"You are!" Robert said. "You're always the bear. Let's hear you growl!"

"Woof!" Daddy said, dropping down on his hands and knees. "Woof! Woof! Woof!"

"Oh, don't scare me so!" Elizabeth said, crawling backward. "Please don't scare me so! I'm awfully afraid of bears!"

"Woof! Woof! Woof!" Daddy said, pawing the lawn and waddling after her.

"You're missing me!" Robert said. "Here I am. Growl some at me."

"Woof! Woof! Woof!"

"Look! Here are some berries for the big black bear," Elizabeth said, holding out a handful of grass. "Do you want some berries?"

"Woof!" Daddy said, licking the short blades of grass from her hand. "Woof! Woof!"

"I'm going to ride the bear!" Robert said. "Look at me! I'm going to ride the big black bear's back. I'm not afraid!"

Robert ran and climbed on Daddy's back, whipping the bear with a maple tree twig to make him get-up.

"Now, let's play horse," Daddy said. "This is a new game. We've never played horse before, have we, Elizabeth?"

"Oh, let's do," she said. "Hurry, Robert! Get down off the bear's back so we can all play horse. It's going to be lots of fun, isn't it, Daddy?"

"It certainly is," Daddy said. "But who is going to be the horse?"

"Oh you are!" Elizabeth said. "You be the horse."

"All right, I'm the horse. Now look out! Here comes the wild white horse!"

"What's the horse going to do?" Robert said.

"The horse wants some sugar," Daddy said. "The horse likes sugar better than anything else. He likes salt sometimes, but he would rather have sugar now. He hasn't had any for a long time."

"Where's the horse going to get sugar?" Elizabeth asked. "We haven't any out here."

"Neigh ! Neigh ! Neigh !" Daddy said, galloping around in a circle on his hands and feet.

"The horse is looking for sugar," Robert said. "Look out ! Don't let the horse kick you !"

Daddy stopped, twisted his head from side to side and raised his foot high in the air behind him.

"Look out !" Robert said. "The horse is going to kick !"

Daddy held his foot high up behind him a moment and kicked. He kicked so hard it made his shoe come tumbling off.

"The horse kicked his shoe off !" Elizabeth said. "Let's be careful, because the horse is angry with us for not giving him some sugar."

"I'm not afraid of the horse," Robert said. "Watch me ! I'm going to ride him !"

"He'll throw you off," Elizabeth said. "You'd better wait until he finds some sugar."

"Watch me !" Robert said. "This is the way to catch a wild horse and ride him."

"Neigh ! Neigh ! Neigh !" Daddy said, galloping off. He stopped and kicked high in the air with his other foot. That shoe did not come off as the other one had.

"Here I go !" Robert said. "Watch me ride the wild horse all around the pasture !"

Daddy stood still until Robert had climbed on his back. Then he shook his head from side to side, snorted, and pawed the lawn.

"Let me ride, too," Elizabeth said. "I want to ride the wild horse."

She climbed on Daddy's back behind Robert, and held Robert around the waist so she would not be thrown off when the horse bucked and reared.

"What are you getting down flat on the ground for,



Daddy?" Robert said. "We are all on. You can get up now. Make the wild horse snort and buck."

Daddy lay down flat on the lawn. Elizabeth got off, but Robert took the maple tree twig and tried to make the horse get up.

"The horse won't get up," Robert said. "He wants to lie down."

"Why won't you play horse now?" Elizabeth said. "Don't you want to play any more, Daddy? We haven't had a ride on the wild horse's back yet."

Robert sat down on the lawn in front of Daddy, pouting a little. He broke the maple tree twig into dozens of small pieces and threw them away.

"Daddy, won't you play any more?" Elizabeth asked. "If you are tired playing horse, let's play another game. I know a good one called 'Hunting the Kitty.' Don't you want to play that with us?"

Robert got up and walked toward the porch. He stopped and looked back at Daddy and Elizabeth on the lawn.

"I'm going to tell Mother you won't play with us, Daddy," he said. "She'll come out and make you play."

He ran into the house. Elizabeth moved closer to Daddy and began searching for four-leaf clovers in the grass.

The red leaves on the maples in the yard were falling to the lawn. When a gust of wind came, the leaves spun and twisted on the branches, fluttering to the ground like small pieces of torn red paper. Over on the hill the orange and gold trees rustled and bowed in the wind, shaking themselves until the under-side of the leaves turned outward in the sun.

Mother and Robert came out the front door and walked across the lawn. Mother put her finger over her lips so that no one would make any noise. She came closer, tip-toeing softly over the smooth lawn, trying not to make a sound.

Robert held her by the hand, holding his finger over his lips, too. Elizabeth put her hand over her mouth, nodding her head up and down, and opening her eyes wider and wider. In another moment they could all scare Daddy, because he did not know that Mother was there.

When Mother got almost in front of him, she took her finger from her lips and nodded at Robert and Elizabeth. He and Elizabeth were all but bursting with excitement.

"Boo!" Mother cried, falling down beside Daddy on the lawn. "Boo!"

"Boo! Daddy" Robert said.

"Boo!" said Elizabeth jumping up and down.

Mother looked down at Daddy, waiting for him to raise his head and smile at her. She waited a minute and bent closer.

A small black ant was crawling over his nose. On the back of his white shirt a green grasshopper sat with his long legs all ready to spring.

"Look at the funny grasshopper," Robert said, touching it with a blade of grass.

"He's resting on Daddy's shirt. Look at him jump so high!"

"Sh-h!" Mother said, putting her finger over her lips again. "Don't make any sounds. Daddy is fast asleep."

"Then how can we play, if Daddy isn't going to be the wild horse?" Elizabeth asked.

"Playing horse isn't much fun," Robert said. "I want to play something else when Daddy wakes up."

Mother sat down closer to Daddy, taking one of his hands in hers. She held it for a moment, and dropped it.

"What's the matter?" Elizabeth asked, clutching Mother's skirt. "Why did you scream, Mother?"

Mother was biting her lips and looking down at Daddy's white shirt where the big grasshopper had been sitting. A

maroon maple leaf fluttered down, spinning over and over. It fell on Daddy's shirt and lay there.

"Will Daddy play with us again when he wakes up?" Robert said. "We had almost finished playing horse, and there're some other games we want to play."

"Daddy kicked so hard while we were playing horse that his shoe came off," Elizabeth said. "Look! Here it is!"

She picked it up, and Mother took it from her and held it in both of her hands, pressing it against her breast. Her fingers moved over it as if she were trying to feel what it was without looking at it.

The little black ant on Daddy's nose crawled up to his forehead and stopped there to look at something.

"We must go into the house now," Mother said, taking Elizabeth and Robert by the hands. "I want both of you to go to the playroom and stay there until I call you. Look at the pictures in your books, or build something with your blocks, but do not look out of the window until I call you. Run along now—Robert and Elizabeth. Mother will be busy for a long time."

They went into the house, and Mother waited at the bottom of the stairs while they were going up to the play-room. She leaned against the newel post, holding close to her breast the shoe that Daddy had kicked off when he was the wild horse.

"It's a shame to stay indoors when it's so nice out there," Robert said. "All the red leaves will soon be gone."

"Will you call us the minute Daddy wakes up, Mother?" Elizabeth asked. "Please do. We want to finish playing horse—and we have some new games to play, too."

"Yes," Mother said, "I'll call you."



LOUIS BROMFIELD

*The Urn*



## THE URN

IT was a splendid and "fashionable" funeral, with many members of the American colony (that is to say, those whose names add a peculiar lustre to the social column of the *Paris Daily Herald*) seated about the room.

The religious element was also well represented: besides members of the more conventional sects, there were present Theosophists and Spiritualists, Buddhists and Yogis, New Thoughters and Christian Scientists, for Mrs. Wimpole had always entertained an experimental attitude of mind toward religions, and having, as she observed, "a beautiful gift for friendship," she had picked up many acquaintances on her way through conversions to one or another of these sects.

So they had come at her request to the funeral of her husband, most of them perhaps a trifle curious to see the service which she had planned herself, "as a sort of eclectic celebration of the mysteries of death." One or two of the more rakish and cynical members of the funeral audience held a secret belief that she had been waiting impatiently for her husband to die in order that she might try out this "eclectic service."

As the funeral people said: "There was never such a devoted wife before in the history of the world. She gave up everything for him, especially in those last years when he lingered so. She never left his side. . . ."

One or two thought: "That woman is a monster. . . . She devoured her husband slowly, bit by bit. He never escaped from her for a moment. She gave him no peace. . . ."

Even in death he had not escaped her. Imprisoned in the urn that stood on the Louis Philippe table were the ashes. To the very end she was using him as an object on which to practise the terrible devotion which led her to say : "People say that my nature is almost too intense—it burns."

She was the centre of interest. Dressed all in white like a bride, she sat upon a low dais directly before the urn that contained her husband's ashes. A wreath of tuberose circled her hair just above the pince-nez that embraced a thick, rather too fleshy nose. The classical effect was somewhat marred by the tiny gold chain which led from the pince-nez to a patent gold spring that lay concealed in a fleur-de-lis pin in her ample bosom. Otherwise the contours were as Greek as could be hoped with a figure so full-blossomed and given to ample curves. A spray of tuberose lay across her plump arms. During the ceremony her small blue eyes were fixed upon space with the expression of one who sees beyond the mists and confusion of this world.

Miss Hoskins, a gaunt, thin virgin, with prominent eyes, who had gone somewhat cynically through many conversions and tried almost as many faiths as the bereaved herself, read the service in the overcrowded little *salon* of the house in the Rue Spontini, to which Lydia Wimpole had brought her husband after oil had been discovered in the back-yard of their Arkansas home.

The atmosphere was heavy with the thick scent of flowers, and Miss Hoskins, who was very near-sighted, read the service (all in verse of Lydia Wimpole's own making) haltingly and without regard for the exquisite rhythms. It was only at the moments when Miss Hoskins, reading uncertainly, found herself with an extra syllable on her hands that the countenance of Lydia Wimpole, sitting on the dais, dressed as the Bride of the Hereafter, changed its serene expression. At such times a dark and troubled look of



exasperation crossed her countenance. She was an optimist. If she had not been she would long ago have abandoned her religious adventures.

When Miss Hoskins stumbled badly over the more passionate passages of the Song of Songs with which the bereaved had chosen to end the service, the face did not change its expression. Mrs. Wimpole had not written the Song of Songs. So it was of no importance to her how it was read.

From time to time a discreet and admiring murmur drifted up to the dais. She was certain of what they were saying: "Doesn't she look serene and lovely. She has made of death a beautiful thing "

Everyone forgot the small bronze urn, embossed with the esoteric symbols of three religions. It seemed less the centre, the reason for the occasion, than simply another piece of bric-à-brac in a room which already resembled a second-hand shop. In death Horace Wimpole was obscured as he had been in life.

The ashes were kept there on the table during the days of packing for the return to America. They were surrounded always by a wreath of fresh and sickly scented tuberoses. Callers who came to bid her farewell found that there was a depressing truth in her assertion that Horace was not really dead at all: he was always with her there in the house in the Rue Spontini.

The plans for the burial occupied her mind a great deal, and the faithful Miss Hoskins came in daily to discuss the question. And at length it was settled, in all its details.

She described it to a friend (a Mrs. Blanchard, whose acquaintance she had made during her studies in Spiritism).

"I have thought it over," she said, in a voice which was

known among her friends for its "sweetness"—"I have thought it over, and I feel that Horace ought not to be buried on foreign soil. He will rest more quietly in his own homestead in Arkansas. Near our place there—the place where oil was discovered—there is a mountain with a pointed rock at the top. I propose to have the urn" (she made one of those graceful gestures which she had learned at a class in Greek poise, to include the object on the marble-topped table)—"I propose to have the urn sealed in that rock, following a little ceremony which I have thought out."

The ceremony, she said, would be conducted by herself—the widow. "Oh," she protested, wiping away a brave tear, "I feel strong enough. It won't be too much for me. I'll do it because I know that it is what Horace would have liked."

There were to be six virgins dressed all in white, who would do a dance symbolising the great question—"O Death, where is thy sting? O Grave, thy victory?" She herself would sit a little to one side, holding the urn, and on placing it in the rock, she planned to read an ode of her own composition, which began, "There is no death; one only steps across."

She had written already to the members of the Sorosis Club of Poseleta, Arkansas, of which she was still a member, inviting them to attend the ceremony.

On hearing the plan, the fat and cynical Mrs. Throssington, whose somewhat abstract and technical mind Lydia Wimpole had always disliked and distrusted, asked with an air of innocence: "But where can you find six virgins who can dance? And how can you make certain that they are virgins?"

It was a question which Mrs. Wimpole dismissed with a snort.

Two weeks after the service at the house in the Rue Spontini, passengers of the *Paris* found in their midst a large, rather florid woman, who dressed always in white and wore

a long white veil which floated behind her as she walked. She seemed to spend most of her time on deck, going round and round tirelessly : weather had no effect upon her. She appeared even on days when none but excellent sailors could raise their heads from their pillows. She was conspicuous even among the usual collection of curiosities included in the passenger list of a transatlantic liner, and gradually it became known that she was Lydia Wimpole, widow of an Arkansas oil magnate, and that she wore white in place of the conventional widow's weeds.

She was, the more interested came to learn, a devotee of everything occult, and was preparing to present to the world a new faith—an eclectic religion which she explained would be the Esperanto of religions.

They also learned that she was travelling with the ashes of the deceased Horace Wimpole, which she carried in a special travelling case made for the purpose, of purple leather embossed in gold with the esoteric symbols of three religions.

In the large outside cabin of Mrs. Wimpole the urn occupied a prominent place among the flowers and boxes of bonbons sent to the steamer by admirers and disciples. Indeed, it bore an absurd resemblance to one more box of bonbons in a cabin which had the air of belonging to a prominent music-hall actress.

On the night of the fifth day out the widow was seized in the middle of the night by an intense conviction that someone—some spirit—was in communication with her, asking her to remove the lid of the urn. Afterwards, in recounting the experience to the faithful Miss Hoskins, she said : “I felt suddenly that I was in the presence of a dazzling light and out of the centre of it came a voice which I seemed to recognise as that of Horace. Sitting up in my berth, I heard it say : ‘You have shut me in ! You have suffocated me ! Let me be free !’ And then suddenly the light disappeared

and I found myself sitting upright in the dark cabin, conscious that I had just participated in a marvellous experience. So I rose, and unscrewing the lid of the urn, left the ashes open to fresh and beautiful sea air. I have never heard the voice, nor seen the light, from that day to this."

But there was a part of the experience which she neglected to relate : indeed, it was a secret shared, strangely enough, only by the gaunt, red-faced Norman stewardess who took care of her cabin. This woman was a realistic creature, whose whole mind and soul were wrapped up in keeping her row of cabins in perfect order, so that she might thus earn large tips and hasten her retirement from a seafaring life to open a café at Hesdin. She worked mildly and thoroughly, absorbed by that single passion which blotted out even her fatal tendency toward seasickness.

So, on the morning following the remarkable revelation which came to Mrs. Wimpole, she set to work as usual in the cabin, making the dust to fly, putting fresh water on the withered tributes of Mrs. Wimpole's admirers, throwing out of the porthole fruits that had gone bad, emptying cigarette ashes.

By eleven she had finished her work, and by the time Mrs. Wimpole, in a cloud of white veils, descended, the cabin was all in beautiful order, the flowers were neatly arranged, the clothes hung where they should be, the berth neatly made up. Only one thing was changed. The urn, the sacred urn, embossed with the mystic symbols of three religions, had been moved, irreverently moved ! It stood on the shelf above the washstand !

Mrs. Wimpole, who was by nature never very nice to servants, grew red with anger. Crossing the cabin, she took down the sacred urn. One glance was enough to convey the whole of the horrible truth.

The urn was empty !

In her fury she rang all the bells at once, but fortunately none responded but the gaunt stewardess. She faced the wild Mrs. Wimpole (her veils all awry, and her lovely serenity all vanished) with a dumb look of astonishment.

Brandishing the urn at the stricken stewardess, Mrs. Wimpole cried: "What have you done, you stupid fool! What have you done!"

And the stewardess, judging from the violence of the gestures and the article which Mrs. Wimpole held heroically aloft that her agitation was concerned with the urn, replied: "Madam, I simply emptied the cigarette ashes out of the porthole!"

"You fool! You idiot! That was my husband!"

She threatened the stewardess with dismissal, with imprisonment. She would sue the company. She was still making wild threats when the stewardess—suddenly aware that she had for three days been handing about a corpse—fled in superstitious horror down the corridor.

For two hours Mrs. Wimpole lay more dead than alive on the berth, and at the end of that time when she arose she had recovered the sweet serenity which she had displayed at the funeral. She again summoned the terrified stewardess, and this time she appeared calm and beautiful.

"You must not be afraid, my good woman," she said "If you keep silent, I shall not hold you responsible. It was an accident. Only never mention the subject to anyone!" And she sped the bewildered stewardess two voyages nearer her ambition to retire by pressing a thousand-franc note graciously into her red and bony hand.

When the door was closed again, Mrs. Wimpole screwed the lid carefully back on the urn, and placed it once more among the bonbons and withered flowers.

It was this part of the story which she never told, even to the faithful Miss Hoskins.

Six weeks after the lamentable accident, the newspapers of the Middle West and South printed the story of Horace Wimpole's burial. They referred to Horace as a man who had acquired great wealth through the discovery of oil on his land in Arkansas. With his wife he had lived in Paris for several years, but like a good American he had chosen Arkansas as his final resting-place.

His ashes, contained in an urn designed by his widow, were placed in the niche of a rock in the highest part of the Ozarks during the course of an impressive ceremony, at which his wife (dressed all in white) stood by and read an ode of her own composition. As she read, six virgins (only the Southern Press, either through modesty or an unwarranted cynicism, referred to them as young girls), also dressed in spotless white, executed a "dance pantomime" on the theme "O Death, where is thy sting?"

A little later, pictures of the ceremony appeared in the illustrated dailies and in the news reels of motion picture houses. The news reel bore the title, "Arkansas widow plans and carries out novel burial service for her late spouse. Mrs. Horace Wimpole reads ode at final resting-place of husband, while young girls dance to the music of Mendelssohn's 'Spring Song.'" And then on the screen appeared the ample figure of Lydia Wimpole, clad in flowing white robes, a wreath of tuberoses pressed low over her grey hair above the nose-glasses. In one hand she held the parchment scroll from which she read the "ode" beginning: "There is no death: one only steps across!"

In the background leapt the figures of six virgins, who had learned dancing from the Henrietta Eda McCloskey, teacher of Greek Poise in Little Rock. It finished with the final gesture of the widow placing the empty urn in the niche.

And when sufficient time had been allowed for the news and pictures to percolate through the country, it was announced

that a female Messiah had appeared bringing a new religion. The Messiah, Lydia Wimpole by name, had of course set up headquarters in California.

It was all a great success, and no one knew, of course, save the widow and a Norman ex-stewardess, now mistress of a buvette at Hesdin, that Horace Wimpole had escaped at last somewhere in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. And no one, not even the widow or the ex-stewardess, ever knew whether or not Horace Wimpole had really appeared in a blaze of light in mid-Atlantic, crying out : "You have shut me in ! You have suffocated me ! Let me be free !"





NORMAN MATSON

*Death on the Straightaway*



## DEATH ON THE STRAIGHTAWAY

RANDALL PATTERSON'S bright blue cabriolet cost him eight thousand dollars. It was heavy and fast, the hood so high that the driver's angle of vision came to earth a hundred yards beyond the headlights. Never mind, it was handsome and arrogant ; a car for a handsome and arrogant young man.

Randall Patterson kicked it into a rush down the curving drive of the Forbes's place, lurched sharply round into the Balentine turnpike which runs straight as geometry from Cornwall nine miles to the village of Dangerfield, four lanes, good cement. It was a bright day, too early for traffic ; easy as yawning he let her out to sixty, to seventy.

To the sleepy hiker with the weary thumb he looked like life as it ought to be. Actually Randall Patterson was poisoned with disappointment. He felt old (he was twenty-eight) and the future was darkness. Last night Helen Forbes, beautiful, rich, had said no, and meant it. That was a fact, no matter how often he turned it over in his mind. It was a fact that complicated life, now and for ever. A fraction of an ounce of further pressure on the accelerator. Eighty miles an hour. . . .

From the other, the Dangerfield end of that straightaway, Hattie Bickerton, with four hens in a crate beside her, directed her flivver toward Cornwall. Hattie had once taught school. Now she was a pensionnaire, besides that she was a raiser of poultry, a psychologist, observer of life,

a spinster. In plain words she was the biggest gossip in Dangerfield.

Black hairs grew here and there on her chin. Blue youthful eyes looked out from smile wrinkles. She sat straight as a ramrod as she drove, the two brown pom-poms on her round hat bobbing about in the breeze. She was thinking that when she delivered the hens to Miss Anderson at the Forbes mansion, she just might learn a bit more about Randall Patterson and Miss Helen. Not to tell, nor to write—just to know. There was something of the pure artist about Hattie. She liked her gossip for its own sake.

When she saw the bright blue car she stopped.

It was upside down, four wheels turning. In the bright air drifting away over the coarse tidal grass, there was a thinning haze of dust.

Randall Patterson had a crooked, hollow-cheeked face, and the nose had been broken in an airplane crash ; but he was handsome, oh, he was handsome, even in wide-eyed death, tawny hair draggled with oil and earth. Hattie bent down over him. His hands lay above his head. The backs of both were deeply scratched. She sniffed and the brown pom-poms danced on her hat ; she hunted with nose and eyes, pounced on his right lapel. A posy was pinned there, a tiny bouquet, one yellow rosebud, one white gillyflower, a green leaf for background—odd but charming.

"I'll be confounded," Hattie said, thus reaching her extreme of profanity in one jump, and she straightened her meagre inches, looked carefully all about, began to walk in widening circles around the body. All she found was a grey and lavender hat-box and the cover of same ; inside the box, the usual pasteboard oval, was a ruddy, sticky stain. She was thoughtfully studying this when a State cop arrived on his motor-cycle.

"Hattie Bickerton !" said he. "Good morning."

He was Bob Harris, formerly a Dangerfield boy, indeed had been a pupil of hers in the B 4th grade. He was a boy still, she thought, so proud of his Sam Browne harness, the heavy gun thonged to his lean shank ; but she watched as if respectfully while he listened and felt for a heartbeat. When he took out and wiped a pocket mirror she spoke : "Mercy sakes, Robert, use your eyes ; the boy's dead, look at these dilated pupils ! Dead's beef, he is."

Bob Harris put the mirror away. "Speedin' ?"

"Like a bullet."

"You witnessed it ?"

"No," dryly, "that's a deduction. After his front wheels hit sand the car travelled through the air like a bird for thirty feet. Then it bounced and rolled over three times."

They looked along the still deserted highway, broad and smooth—safe.

"Musta been crowded over by some southpaw driver going toward Cornwall."

Hattie shook her head. "He was alone on the highway. For five minutes I waited for gas at Ike's station a mile away, and nobody passed going this way."

"Alone and all at once he turns off ? He was drunk."

"Smell," Hattie said. "Or maybe your nose wouldn't tell you, since you've had a drink already this morning. I don't use it and I can smell liquor a block away. He hadn't tasted any."

"Then a front shoe blew out."

Hattie nodded. "Maybe it did ; but if it did somebody came along and mended it because all the tyres are tight full of air now."

Officer Harris scratched his brown curls. He was young and handsome, too. Between them, the dead youth and the live, little Hattie Bickerton stood, her brown pom-poms bobbing : impersonal, thoughtful.

"Robert, you had better get along to a telephone."

He didn't like her tone, which was peremptory. It reminded him of school.

"Don't rush me, Miss Hattie. Now, look, he was driving smack in the middle of the cement ; here's the mark where all at once he turned. The question is, why did he turn ? Maybe the steering gear bust."

"Maybe a meteor hit him," Hattie suggested insincerely. "That's possible, too. Steering gears on cars like that one don't break, and you know it."

"Well, well, there was a cause to it. There musta been."

"Did you notice the young man's expression, Robert ? It's seared. It's terrified. What did he see to make him look like that ?"

"What are you getting at, Miss Hattie ?"

"Look at this." She showed him the blood-stained hat-box. He said : "Some other car threw it away."

"*Thren*, Robert ! And the scratches on his hands ?"

"Most natural thing in the world, Miss Hattie. He stuck 'em through the windshield."

"He was wearing goggles. They're lying beside him."

"And that," he smiled, "says what ?"

"That says the windshield was laying flat the way he liked it when he was speeding so he could feel the strong wind in his face. So he didn't put his two hands through the windshield. I'll wager you'll find every bit of that shatterproof glass sticking inside of the frame, anyway. You get along to a telephone, Robert," she said. "But wait, get out your notebook." He got it out. "Take down the licence number."

"Say, I know that. I can do this." Nevertheless he waited once he had the number scribbled down.

"Name's Randall Patterson, age twenty-eight. Week-end guest of Helen Forbes. She lives in the big white house at Beach Point ; she's an orphan, twenty years old, ward of

Fanny Burke, and she'll have seven million dollars next year."

"You're a gossip," Bob Harris said, "and you always was a gossip, I must say. What's all that got to do with this accident?"

"First place I'm not a gossip; second place this wasn't an accident!"

"What was it then?"

"It was," she hesitated—"it was—deliberate. We'll prove that. He was well known as an aviator. Everybody knows he's engaged or almost engaged to Helen Forbes. You'd better telephone, Robert, and get your name in the papers."

"Did *he* have seven millions?"

"He had his nerve—and his good looks. Good-bye."

"You stayin'?"

"I'm looking for something." She went away from the road in short quick steps, head down; but before he had kicked his motor-cycle engine into life another idea had come to her and to his surprise he saw her run back to her flivver, saw her climb in and rattle off toward Cornwall at what was—for her, and for the car as well, a very high rate of speed.

The three sons of Dr. Curley had all at one time or another been taught by Hattie Bickerton, so she and Dr. Curley were old friends. He was, besides being a general practitioner, the coroner, and as medical officer would act in the Patterson case. To him Hattie went next morning with a present of a dozen fresh eggs, the small kind that he liked specially, under one arm, and under the other a square box of some sort wrapped in paper.

He listened to her attentively, even respectfully, for she had several times helped both him and the district attorney with her enormous, detailed knowledge of other people's business, and with her homely good sense as well.

Dr. Curley whistled, nodding his head slowly. He said :  
“They’re here now. Which one shall we question first ?”

Hattie wanted the girl first.

Helen Forbes was a beauty, slim and dark. She was withdrawn, seemed older than she was. In her expression was that stupefaction, that stunned look that comes from great wealth, with its assurance of all material things. She was simply, almost shabbily dressed, without jewellery, and she was small ; nevertheless power walked into the room with her, the power of great wealth, and even Hattie was deferential.

She answered questions directly, literally, her slightly bulging eyes half veiled. “No, he *never* drank. His heart was sound. If he had heart trouble how could he go after altitude records. He was quite healthy, I believe.”

Dr. Curley cleared his throat. “You and he were engaged to be married, were you not ?”

“We were not.”

“But the newspapers . . .”

“They were wrong. I liked him. He said he liked me.” Her tone left it hanging there.

“Ah yes,” Dr. Curley said, uncertainly.

“Doctor, I am very wealthy, as you, as everybody knows. He was not. He was in debt to his ears. He had been grounded for six months for reckless flying. One or two among his creditors held cheques that were not—very good. He was in deep trouble. Perhaps he liked only my money. Do you see ?”

Hattie hitched forward to the edge of her chair so that her feet would touch the floor. “Miss Forbes, he, Mr. Patterson, left your house very early yesterday morning, did he not ?”

“It couldn’t have been long after sunrise.”

“Did you see him—say good-bye to him ?”

“No. Not as he left. As a matter of fact we had talked till late—till three o’clock about.”



For a minute Miss Hattie asked no question. Dr. Curley was silent, too.

The girl raised heavy lids. Her eyes were not dark but light grey, though the lashes were black. She said: "Shall I tell you what we talked about?"

"If you don't mind, Miss Forbes," Hattie said.

"Love," said Helen Forbes. "His for me, that is. It was not a general conversation. He asked me to marry him. I said no."

Hattie looked at Dr. Curley, returned her clear blue eyes to the girl. She said: "You *refused* him? Did Miss Burke know this?"

"Yes, I told her. She asked me, in fact."

"I have only one more question, Miss Forbes, if you do not mind. Did you give a flower, or rather a tiny bouquet to Mr. Patterson yesterday morning?"

"No."

"You were not talking in the garden at three o'clock, then?"

"Certainly not. But I know, I happen to know where the *boutonnière* came from. I heard voices under my window. I had not slept and I got up, looked out. Miss Burke was there. She often rises early. Mr. Patterson, who I believe had not slept at all, was with her. She was pinning the flowers in place. I remember because it surprised me."

"Why?"

"The hour for one thing; and she did not care very much for him. In fact she had repeatedly warned me against him. Several years ago he was in Wall Street. For a time he was customer's man for Miss Burke's own office. She is a stock-broker, as perhaps you know. She told me he was—not to be trusted."

Helen Forbes had been quite calm, even impersonal, but that was training, and will power. Now they saw her with

hurried fingers dig in her bag for a handkerchief, realised that she was crying.

"I sent him to his death," she said, biting her lips.

Hattie watched her, waited a little while, then :

"Your theory is that he committed suicide, deliberately sending his car off the highway?"

"Of course."

"Doctor, may I ask Miss Burke a question or two? No, you stay, Miss Forbes."

There had been gossip about Miss Burke during the twenty-five years she had been confidential secretary for Miss Forbes's money-grubbing father, but the gossip never suggested that she might be more to him than his—secretary. She had one vice : power. Her face was bony ; her mouth thin-lipped and tight ; her iron-grey tweed was cut square, no feminine nonsense about it, or about her ; she wore high black shoes with thick soles. Her eyes, small pupils under eyebrows like opposing check marks, frowning, looked through glasses, the sort that ride noses of Senators and famous attorneys, large oval lenses, down-tending.

"Who is this?" Her "this" was for Hattie.

"Miss Bickerton, formerly of the Board of Education," Dr. Curley said blandly. "She assists me from time to time in—cases."

The big business woman and the small poultry dealer looked straight at each other.

"I happened to be the first to look over the wreck of Mr. Patterson's car, Miss Burke. You need not answer my questions, of course, but if you will be so kind, that will simplify the formality of the inquest."

Miss Burke did not answer.

"Tell me, if you will, does *nepeta cataria* grow wild about the Forbes's place, or is it cultivated?"

"I haven't the least idea what you are talking about."

"I see that, in sober truth, you do not. You are not a garden enthusiast?"

"I haven't the time."

"Perhaps you'd be better for some such healthful hobby."

Hattie had hitched herself to the Doctor's broad desk and now she leaned her elbows on it, her posture quite like the one she took when she hearkened to the gossip of her neighbour across the board fence. With that same kind of interest, unemotional but intense, she looked at Miss Burke as she put her second question :

"Why did you use a hat-box?"

Miss Burke sat like a woman carved in stone. Her long face was grey. "And still," said Miss Burke evenly, "I do not understand you."

Hattie turned to Dr. Curley. "Doctor, what young man would carry anything in a hat-box? Why should he have it with him in the back seat of his cabriolet? Particularly a box from Lorna Le Brun, of Boston, specialist in dignified hats? That is to say, hats like Queen Mary's."

"In their order let me tell you what interested me at the wreck : First, Mr. Patterson's hands, both badly scratched, not by glass, but as if by claws—or *very sharp nails*. Next, that posy in his buttonhole, fresh, you know, fragrant. It hadn't been there many minutes. Finally, the empty bloodstained hat-box. The stain was *inside* only. . . . Oh yes," to Miss Forbes, who had softly exclaimed, horrified, "there was blood there. From those three clues I deduced a third, but could not find it. Then it was I had the inspiration to drive rapidly to the Forbes's place, to deliver my chickens to Miss Anderson at the lodge. She is a town girl, was one of my pupils—she was terrible at arithmetic, but never mind now—and we waited for a few minutes there by the big gates. While we were there, as I had expected, along came a weary, bewildered——"

Miss Burke stood up. She said to Dr. Curley : "I for one

have had enough of this old gossip's fantasy. If you don't mind I'll——"

"Sit *down*, Miss Burke," Hattie said, in the tone she had used for years to the scoundrels of the B 4th grade, and to Miss Burke's own surprise, she sat down. As she did so, Hattie stripped the paper from the wicker cage at her feet, opened and lifted therefrom a large Siamese tomcat. "Weary, bewildered, *he* came through the Forbes's gate," Hattie said. "When I didn't find his body by the wreck I thought: 'He's set out for home already,' and I climbed into my car to beat him there."

At the sight of that characteristic sooty face and pale blue eyes, so like and so unlike the ordinary cat, Dr. Curley drew back with subdued exclamation of repugnance.

Dropped to the floor the animal spoke in a voice peculiarly penetrating. He said: "*Mrar?*" and jumped immediately into Miss Burke's lap and began to purr.

She started violently. A curious thing happened to her face. It trembled, the cheeks, the corners of her mouth.

"Miss Burke, you pinned that posy on the lapel of Mr. Patterson's coat. Just before he climbed into his car you put a hat-box in on the back seat. In that box was that cat; his whole attention occupied by a piece of raw meat, quite bloody. The lurching of the car at the sharp turn into the highway, a turn always taken at high speed by the young gentleman, who was used to the velocity of airplanes, rolled the box on to the floor of the car, thus tossing its flimsy lid and releasing the cat just at the moment that the young man's whole attention was occupied in accelerating toward sixty miles an hour, or more, as he always did, and as you well knew."

Miss Forbes was completely still, her grey eyes direct, unmoving on Hattie.

Miss Burke's masculine chin was up. She had conquered the muscles of her fright, but not its colour.

"It was Miss Anderson who told me, Dr. Curley, that Mr. Patterson had a flaming horror of cats, bad or worse than some people have for snakes."

"Told you when?"

"A week ago. And only the day before yesterday, Monday afternoon, Miss Anderson—and Miss Burke, too—saw him jump shuddering out of a chair in the garden because a cat had touched his leg; he and Miss Forbes had some sharp words about it. The young gentleman was holding a crystal teacup in his hand, the saucer in the other. Both went flying and smashed among the low-growing phlox of the rock garden.

"What happened on the highway we do not actually know, but we can guess. The cat, loathsome, mind you, as a bloated adder to poor Patterson, crawled through the space between the two front seats. There was no wind down there and speed as you know is relative; he had no point of comparison; he was travelling within what the physicists call a 'closed system,' and so far as he could see might have been at home in the drawing-room (which also is racing, relative to the sun at—but never mind that now).

"The point is he liked something about Mr. Patterson, something that impelled him to get even closer. Now Mr. Patterson may have first felt him—crawling in his lap, perhaps, or, perhaps he saw him in the back vision mirror. We do know that wildly, blind with that unreasonable repugnance and fear, he grabbed with both hands for the animal—and caught it. The scratches prove that. And then—well then, the car was turning over and over in the air."

Hattie put her chin down on the back of her hand. "Miss Burke, you murdered Randall Patterson."

"The cat killed him," Miss Burke's voice came from a dry tight throat. It was a croak. "The cat," she repeated.

"The cat?" wondered Hattie. "Did *he* fear the young

man's knowledge of years of embezzlement? Did he, Miss Burke?"

That night the district attorney, Dr. Curley, Officer Bob Harris and Hattie Bickerton, discussed the possibility of prosecution for murder in a case so completely circumstantial. This discussion proved academic, for Miss Burke in her rooms at the Hotel Clarendon-Wyckoff took heroin that same night and never woke again.

Miss Forbes went to Europe, and if she had lost a guardian and a suitor, it was a bad parasitic guardian, a disloyal friend—as Hattie pointed out—and the suitor she did not want. And if all friends, all lovers in the future were to be also in greater or less degree similarly tainted, well, Hattie said, you can't have everything. If you have seven millions of dollars, perhaps you can't have much else.

Dr. Curley asked: "How did you know Miss Burke had appropriated Helen Forbes's money?"

"I didn't," Hattie confessed, "but I knew that Randall Patterson had been rejected, that Miss Burke knew he had. Then he wasn't killed because she feared his control of Helen's fortune. The only other possible motive must be related to the one sin her kind of woman would be capable of—greed. Simple. I knew he had once worked for her because Miss Anderson's gossip included that fact. I took a chance."

A week later Officer Bob Harris came up behind Hattie's flivver on the motor-cycle. He bawled: "Get over," and she did.

"Oh, not your licence. What the devil is *nepeta cataria*?"

"A leaf of it was in that posy Miss Burke pinned on poor Mr. Patterson."

"Yes, I know that. What *is* it?"

"Catnip, Robert. Trust an old maid to know the smell and look of catnip!"

RALPH STRAUS

*Horse of Death*





## HORSE OF DEATH

JOHN CHESTER and I were sitting in the smoking-room of the House of Commons—I had been listening to the Indian debate—when the conversation turned on the matter of coincidence.

“Has it ever occurred to you,” he asked, “that the most extraordinary thing about coincidence is its rarity? What I mean is this: if a husband dies in Switzerland or California or Cape Town, and his loving wife sees him weeding his garden at Clapham at the identical moment, the papers make use of the lady to the extent, sometimes, of a column. Similar cases are quoted, and if it happens to be September at the time, a regular correspondence ensues. You know the kind of thing. But surely the really singular part of the business is the number of husbands who die in Switzerland or California or Cape Town *without* showing themselves in their garden at Clapham.”

I could not help laughing.

“But isn’t it so?”

“I dare say.”

“Of course it is, but everybody is naturally more interested in the one case in which, according to the loving wife, the man does show himself, and, forgetting the nine hundred and ninety-nine other cases in which he doesn’t, assumes that here is clear proof of supernatural phenomena.”

“On the other hand,” I ventured, “some well-authenticated cases are so very extraordinary——”

"But why shouldn't they be extraordinary? Everything is extraordinary. Why, I could give you an instance . . ."

"Please do," said I, and smiled. John Chester was nicely trapped for a story, and knew it, for he shrugged his shoulders and emptied his glass, and passed me a cigar and lit one himself, and smoked for a few moments in silence.

. . . . .

"A few years ago," he began, "I was knocked up with work and went down to the little fishing village of Claniston, in Kent. I had motored through it once or twice before, and had been given excellent luncheons at the inn there, and the landlady had told me then that I might have a bed on reasonable terms whenever I chose. Claniston is miles away from a railway station, and it seemed just the place for a really tired man. So down I went and proposed to do nothing for a week but eat and sleep and look at the sea.

"I arrived, I remember, in the afternoon, and as I was being driven to the inn I noticed in a field just off the road preparations for one of those fairs which move round the country, staying no more than a night or two at each village. And Mrs. Larkins, my landlady, remarked on the coincidence of my arrival and the fair's.

"'We shall all of us be there to-night,' she informed me, 'me and my son and Eliza.' She spoke in tones which implied that I was expected to accompany them, and go I did, with Mrs. Larkins, and her great hulking villainous son, and Eliza, who was the maid-of-all-work. We became separated before long, I am glad to say, but by that time I had ridden on the roundabout, and seen the fattest lady on earth—she was nearly as stout as old Lady Raynescourt—and had felt sad for the human skeleton, and had watched those detestable swing-boats, and thrown wooden balls at coco-nuts, and had witnessed what was called for some curious reason a prize-fight, and in general done what was expected of me.

I had even been squirted by some village maiden keen to show me that she was as good as myself. A fair, you know, is a splendid thing to make you young again.

"I suppose I had been there half an hour, and was well inured to the screeching strains of the automatic orchestra and the shouting and the hundreds of other noises, and was about to walk home, when I saw a small crowd gather outside one of the tents on the outskirts of the fair. I walked across and listened to a man dressed as Mephistopheles, who was howling at the top of his raucous voice.

"For the small sum of fourpence, I learned, you could witness, inside his tent, the wonderful exhibition of Professor Torino, whose clairvoyant exploits had charmed and mystified every crowned head and learned scientist in Europe. The crowd seemed uncertain what to do, but I, as you know, have a liking for such things, and I boldly made my way up to Mephistopheles, paid my fourpence like a man, and was shown into the tent.

"Here there were two or three rows of chairs facing a rude stage hidden from view by a red curtain with yellow flowers painted on it. For nearly a minute I was the sole audience, but my patronage had evidently decided the crowd, for it streamed in, and in a very short while the tent was full. Mephistopheles appeared, walked up to the curtain, and drew it aside to disclose an antique sofa, behind which an acetylene lamp was burning with peculiar brilliance.

"I was rather pleased with that acetylene lamp. It hinted at mystery, and the audience was obviously impressed. Little things like that, you know, mean much to an entertainment such as Mephistopheles was about to give us. I prepared to enjoy myself.

"Well, Mephistopheles climbed on to the stage, which stood a foot off the ground, and made another speech. That was his great point. I think that man could have made speeches

on any subject under the sun. He informed us that at enormous cost he had secured the services of the two geniuses who had mystified and charmed all the kings and queens they had ever met during a career which had extended . . . and so on. That took about ten minutes, and we were just beginning to be a little impatient when he gave a half-turn and beckoned to somebody behind.

"Then a man with grey hair and a black moustache came on and bowed awkwardly. He was followed by a thin woman dressed in a dirty white garment that gave out a faint rustle. Her sunken eyes and tired face suggested—oh, everything that was horrible and degrading and ugly. Then her husband, in a feeble voice, gave an epitome of what he proposed to do. He muttered some unintelligible information about the various universities which had presumably honoured him, showing us at the same time a silver medal at his breast. Then he made some passes over his wife. The thin woman shivered and fell back—with some skill—on to the sofa where she lay motionless.

"Then we were invited to put any question we chose to 'the lady in the trance.' I watched the audience carefully. They did not quite know what to make of the thing, and nobody spoke. So, in order to set the ball rolling, I asked a question about a certain colleague of mine, and the reply was—what shall I say?—well, it was skilful. It was so skilful that it aroused my admiration, and feeling that I was expected to say something, I murmured 'Quite right,' and clapped my hands. The audience, duly impressed, followed suit.

" 'Any further questions you would care to put?' asked Torino.

" 'The winner of the Bridbury Stakes?' asked somebody behind me. I turned round and saw the dirty-faced son of my landlady.

“‘Alas! we cannot answer any such question.’ Torino’s tones were apologetic. ‘The law of the land . . . the police . . .’ He trailed off into some explanation.

For a moment I feared trouble—Claniston is a sporting village—but a rustic who had not heard young Larkin’s question bawled out an inquiry about some matter of local interest. His friends backed him up, and the Bridbury Stakes were forgotten. Torino turned to his wife, who gave an answer that appeared popular, for there was loud applause. And the entertainment continued until Mephistopheles decided that we had been given our full fourpennyworth, and passed round a bag for donations. Then we slipped out, and I started to walk back to the inn.”

\* \* \* \* \*

John Chester paused to attend to his cigar.

“Now I don’t pretend,” he continued, “to give you reasons for thinking that Mme Torino was never in a trance at all. That is beside the point—and for all I care she may have been in that state which the newspapers and popular entertainers like to call *clairvoyant*. The real point is this: it was a very dark night, and, contrary to my expectation, I was not in the least tired. That is the infernal irony of things. The first opportunity I had had in which to laze I felt extremely wide-awake and energetic. Sleep was impossible. The night was warm, and I decided to take a walk over the cliffs. Mrs. Larkins had given me a latch-key.

“Well, I must have walked over the downs for nearly an hour before I came once again into Claniston. I had passed not a soul, and the night was so dark that at times I could hardly see my way at all. Claniston is sufficiently primitive to have no lamps at all in its single street. The private entrance to my inn was at the end of a narrow passage. I had come, as I thought, to this passage, but must have walked up another path which led to the door of a large

barn, standing next to the inn and used for storing hay and straw. I was about to go back when I heard a curious sound like a moan, and stood still. Then a harsh voice swore, and a thin ray of light came through a chink in the door.

"Wondering what was happening, I put my eye to that chink, and witnessed as delightful a little melodrama as ever the old Lyceum audiences can have enjoyed. For there on the carpet of straw was the estimable Larkins pointing a revolver, whether loaded or not I cannot tell you, at the unfortunate Torino and his wife. I have never seen two people so terrified. There was a single candle set on an old box, and it was casting almost as curious a light as the acetylene lamp of the rather more legitimate entertainment I had been witnessing an hour ago.

"Well, I watched and listened. I ought, I suppose, to have fetched the village constable, and so helped him to well-earned promotion, but I did not. I just watched, fascinated. And then I understood the meaning of it all, for Torino was making the usual passes over his wife, who fell back on to the straw and lay still.

"'What do you wish to know?' asked the poor man, retaining even in these trying conditions a professional air.

"'Oi want yew to answer me just this one 'ere question. Wot's the 'orse as 'll win the Bridbury Stakes next Thursday? Now, none o' your rotting nonsense. I know as 'ow yew can tell these things, and in this 'ere case, yew've got to.'

"So that was it, you see: a polite little piece of—well, blackmail, carried out quite securely in this old barn, with an unfortunate and trespassing witness in the shape of an inquisitive member of Parliament.

"Torino, I could see, was smiling pathetically. I wondered what he would do. Here was surely a test of his genuineness. On the other hand it might merely be a test of his artistry. Which it was I'll leave for you to decide."

"What did he say?" I asked, unable to refrain longer from the interruptions which long experience has taught me are exceedingly distasteful (except at certain well-marked moments) to John Chester.

"He said a thing which gave him my sympathy. He looked at that hulking bully of a Larkins and said: 'Then you believe in my wife's powers of clairvoyance?'"

"The man's lower lip stuck out as he played with his revolver. 'None o' that,' he said, and I could see that he was suspicious of trickery. 'None of yer long words as a feller can't make 'ead or tail of. Oi wants a plain answer to a plain question. Then we can say good night. Now, wot's the 'orse as'll win the Bridbury Stakes? Oi thinks Oi knows, but Oi wants to 'ear yewer old woman say the same thing.' He smiled grimly.

"'You wish to know the winner of the Bridbury Stakes, run next Thursday? I will ask my wife. But you promise to go if we give you an answer?'"

"'We settled all that afore,' said my landlady's son, showing irritation. 'Yew keep to yewer part of the business, an' Oi'll keep to mine.'

"Which seemed fair. I waited, not daring to move. Torino had turned to his wife, muttering words which I could not hear. Larkins looked on with interest. The second entertainment that evening had every chance of being more satisfactory to him than the first, in addition to which it had cost him fourpence less. I could almost bring myself to admire his determination. Quite a lot of skill must have been expended on staging this scene in the barn, and I wondered how he had managed to do it.

"And then the woman spoke. She spoke in perfectly clear tones. I heard every word.

"'There is a park,' she said, 'with crowds of people. They're all shouting. Something is exciting them. I don't

quite understand what they're doing. Ah, there is a horse, and another galloping past them. It is a racecourse. They are cheering a horse coming out of the paddock.' She paused for a moment, and her audience's mouth opened wide with astonishment. He forgot to point the revolver at the professor. 'Yes, a lot of horses,' she went on in her dull, even tones, 'are coming from the paddock. I can see them distinctly . . . but something is happening. I can't quite understand. A big brown horse with a white star on its forehead. . . .'

"'Yes, yes, that's White Star,' cried Larkins excitedly. 'Go on, Missus, that's my fancy.'

"'This brown horse—why, it has no rider! It must have broken away. The jockey has been thrown at the paddock gates. Oh, it has kicked a man near the railings. Poor man, he has been kicked badly. Yes, I can see distinctly. It is dashing down the course. The jockey is following. Now they have captured the horse. It is restive, but I think it will win. Yes, I am sure it will win. . . .'

"'Gawd! White Star!' shouted the audience. 'She means White Star right enough. Go on. Will it win? My fancy. Oi'll get twelve as sure as . . . Go on, Missus. If it wins, Oi'll. . . .'

"The revolver was forgotten.

"The woman went on speaking. 'Yes, the jockey is on the horse again. The man who was kicked is dying. He'll die in a moment. Can't you see him dying with the crowd round him?'

"'Ere, that's nuth'n t' do with the race. Come on an' tell us if White Star wins.'

"'He's dead,' said the woman in reply. 'Now the horses are at the post. They've started. They're running round the bend. I know the winner. It's the horse that escaped from the paddock. It is third now. The jockey has red and white colours on his coat. I can see them. Can't you see



them? Look, the people are cheering. There! My horse has won—the big horse with the white star. . . .’ She stopped, and Torino turned to his audience.

“‘That’s all,’ said he.

“‘White Star?’ asked Larkins.

“‘Yes, White Star will win the Bridbury Stakes.’

“‘My fancy,’ repeated the man pompously, ‘an’ a damn good price it’ll be, too. Back it.’ Torino shook his head sadly. The other put the revolver into his pocket. ‘Thanks. ’Ere, give us yewer ’and. Yew’ve behaved like a gen’elman. Shake.’

“I waited to see Torino put out a trembling hand, and silently walked down that dark passage and away over the downs again. I could not go in just then, and it must have been one o’clock before I finally turned in.

“I was wondering, you see, what I should do.”

“You went, of course, to see the race run?”

John Chester smiled. “My dear fellow,” said he, “don’t you see that the Torinos were clever people. They knew that the man would go as soon as they answered his question, and go I’ve no doubt he did. How the question was answered could hardly matter, could it? Besides, if the Torinos were able to prophesy the winners of races, you don’t suppose they would have been performing in booths for a bare pittance?”

“No, I don’t,” said I.

“Very well, then,” said John Chester for the second time that evening.

“I arranged to go to Bridbury on the day of the race, and a very remarkable race it proved to be.”

“But I suppose White Star won the race?” I persisted.

“It was a remarkable race,” was all the reply I received, and was conscious that my interruption had been out of place.

"Yes," he repeated after a pause that was considerably longer than usual, "it was a remarkable race. I shall not easily forget it. And I am not a superstitious person. I am not even a person who cares particularly about risking his money on horses. But that day at Bridbury I put two pounds each way on a large horse with a white star on its forehead. I remember being told at the time by Sir John Lade that the horse had no chance whatever against his own animal, but pointed out that I was there for a holiday, and reserved to myself the luxury of backing my, or rather Madame Torino's fancy.

"Well, the great race came on, and the ring was shouting itself hoarse. I discovered that Sir John Lade's horse, Otway the Second, was favourite. Denizen came next, White Star a mere outsider at twelves. One or two horses had come out of the paddock, and were cantering up the course. I myself was standing in one of the enclosures.

"Suddenly I was aware of a slight stir near the paddock gates, and a moment later a riderless horse dashed out and began a mad gallop after the others. It swerved towards the railings just opposite to where I was standing. The crowd, of course, was pressing. One man, I could see, was leaning forward with a knee on the ground. He seemed to irritate the animal, which in another second had struck out at him, kicking his head. . . .

"Oh, yes, it sounds curious, but it undoubtedly happened much as Mme Torino had foretold, and I began to see a chance of winning some money. It was all done so quickly that few realised what was happening until all was over. The man who had been kicked fell back with a groan, and they took him away. Then the jockey who had been thrown by the gates came running out. They secured the run-away further down the course, and in a few moments all was quiet.

"The race was run."

"With White Star the winner?"

"If you studied your Racing Calender, you would know that he won by what is called a short head from Otway the Second. I remember chaffing Sir John Lade about the horse afterwards. I won nearly thirty pounds, and blessed the Torinos."

"It was an extraordinary coincidence," said I.

"Wasn't it?" smiled John Chester. "But that, as you have guessed, was not all."

"Not all?"

"The man who was kicked died a few minutes later."

"Just as the woman had predicted!"

"Precisely!"

There came another pause, but shorter this time, while John Chester puffed at his cigar. "I walked across the course," he went on, "and found a small crowd standing round the man who'd been kicked. Two men with a stretcher arrived at the same moment. I saw them lift up the bleeding figure. Not a pleasant sight. No. I recognised him, too."

"You. . . ."

"Oh, of course, the man who'd been kicked was young Larkins."

The division bell was ringing.



GOUVERNEUR MORRIS

*Derrick's Return*



## DERRICK'S RETURN

DERRICK dreamed that Indians had captured him and had laid him face down in their camp-fire and were slowly burning his head off. As a matter of fact, a surgeon was working out a difficult problem in the back of Derrick's throat, and for a little while, towards the end of the operation, anæsthesia had not been complete.

The operation was a success. Something that ought not to have been in Derrick's throat was now out of it, and an incorrect arrangement of this and that had been corrected. The only trouble was a slight, ever so slight bleeding which could not be stopped. The measures taken to stop it were worse than the dream about the Indians, and, still worse, they didn't stop it.

The thin trickle of blood kept on trickling until the reservoirs from which it came were empty, and then the doctors—there were a good many of them now—told the woman who sobbed and carried on that her husband's sufferings were all over. They told her that Derrick was dead.

But Derrick wouldn't have admitted that. Even the bleeding and the pain of which he seemed to have died were now but vague and negligible memories. The great thing was to get out of that body which had already begun to decay, and, making use of a new and perfectly delightful power of locomotion, to get as far away from it as possible. He caught up with sounds and passed them. And he discovered presently that he could move a little more quickly than light. In a crumb of

time some unerring intuition told him that he had come to the Place to which some other unerring intuition had directed him.

Among the beautiful lights and shadows and colours of that Place, he learned fast. There were voices which answered his questions just as fast as he could think them. And something wonderful had happened to his memory, because it was never necessary to think the same question twice. Knowledge came to stay. To discover how very little he had ever really known about anything didn't humiliate him. It was funny. It made him laugh.

And now that he was able to perceive what insuperable obstacles there must always be between the man-mob and real knowledge of any kind, he developed a certain respect for the man-mob. It had taken them, for instance, so many millions of years to find out that the world on which they lived was not flat but round. The wonder was that they had made the discovery at all. And they had succeeded in prying into certain other secrets that they were not supposed to know—ever. As, for instance, the immortality of the soul, and how to commit race suicide.

To let the man-mob discover its own immortality had been a dreadful mistake. Everybody admitted that now. The discovery had made man take himself seriously and caused him to evolve the erroneous doctrine that the way to a happy immortality lay only through making his brief mortality and that of others as miserable as possible.

He thought a question and received this answer, only the answer was in terms of thought rather than in words :

“No, they were put on earth to be happy and to enjoy themselves. For no other reason. But for some reason or other nobody told them, and they got to taking themselves seriously. They were forced to invent all kinds of sins and bad habits so that they could gain favour by resisting them. . . .



But with all respect to what you are now, you must perceive and admit what a perfect ass you were up to the time of your recent, and so-called, death."

He thought another question. The answer was a negative.

"No. They will not evolve into anything better. They have stood still too long and got themselves into much too dreadful a mess. As a pack they will never learn that they were meant only to be happy and to enjoy themselves. Individuals, of course, have from time to time had this knowledge and practised it, and will, but the others won't let them practise it. But don't worry. Man will die out, and insects will step in and succeed where he failed. Souls will continue for millions of years to come to this Place, to learn what you are learning, and be happy to know that they have waked for ever from the wretched little nightmare they made for themselves on earth. And since happiness is inseparable from laughter, it will make them laugh to look back and see how religiously they side-stepped and ducked out of everything that was really worth while."

## II

In the first days of some novel, beautiful or merely exciting experience a man misses neither his friends nor his family. And it was a long time, as time is reckoned here on earth, before Derrick realised that he had parted from all his without so much as bidding any one of them good-bye.

In time, of course, they would all come to the Place where he now found himself, and share with him all that delicious wealth of knowledge and clear vision the lack of which now stood between them and happiness. Here the knowing how to be happy seemed the mere A B C of happiness. It was the first thing you learned. You not only learned how to be happy ; but you applied your easily acquired knowledge and you actually *were* happy.

But how, the earth dweller asks, can the spirit of a man, separated from his wife and children and from the friends he loves, and conscious of the separation be happy? Very easily. It was one of Drrick's first questions, and the answer had been perfectly satisfactory.

He could always go back. He had learned that almost at once. There is no such thing as separation. If he chose to wait where he was, gathering the sweetness and most delightful knowledge among the lovely lights and shadows and colours and perfumes, even as a man gathers flowers in a beautiful garden, in the course of time all those whom he had loved so greatly would come to him and be with him for ever. But if waiting would make him unhappy, here where no one need be unhappy, he could always go back.

When? Now. Soon. Whenever he liked. Oh, it took a little time to get back; but not much. If, for instance, his wife at a given moment were about to lift her hands to her hair, and at that same moment he made up his mind to go back to her and actually started, he would get to her before her hands had moved more than a thousandth of an inch from her lap.

How could he communicate with her? As of old, if he liked. He could be with her. She could hear his voice, on occasions, if the actinic and electrical conditions were just right. She might actually see him. And, of course, he would be able to see her and to hear her. There was never any trouble about that.

If he wanted to be with his family all the time, until they in turn got ready to come here, there was nothing to prevent—absolutely nothing. But had he, in his earth life, ever wanted to be with his dear ones *all* the time? Probably not. One of these days he would probably run into Romeo and Juliet. Very likely he would find them together. They were often together; but not always. Probably, like other loving spirits,

he would not wish to be with *his* family *all* the time. He would probably do as other spirits did—go and come, and go and come.

About communicating? He would probably find that plain straight talk was too strong for earth dwellers. It had been tried out on them often, and usually disastrously. It was like forcing champagne and brandy on men who had always been content with beer. Straight talk from the spirit world often produced epilepsy among earth dwellers. It was too much for them to have all at once.

And then such a very little was enough to content them, and he would find it far more satisfactory to furnish them with a little—a mysteriously and nicely stage-managed *little*—than with a plain-spoken straight from the shoulder *lot*.

To the wise, and he was now beginning to be wise, a hint is sufficient. Suppose, his wife being at her dressing-table, he were to plant himself beneath and rap out a few words in the Morse code? Let him keep on with these tappings until she called in someone to interpret them for her.

He could not only comfort her about his death and reassure her as to his general whereabouts and activities, but he could have a lot of fun with her. There is no harm in having harmless fun with those you love. It is the fear of fun, the suspicion with which it is regarded, more than any one single thing, that has given the man-pack such a miserable run for its money. By means of the Morse code, he could persuade her to buy a ouija board. He would love that, and so would she and the children.

But Derrick kept putting off his return to the earth.

If a loving husband and father were turned loose in the finest jewellery store in the world and told to take his pick of the diamonds and rubies and pearls, as many as he could carry, he would not at once rush off to tell his loved ones of the astounding privilege that had been extended to him. He would

stick to the store. He would hang about if possible for days, taking mental stock of all its precious contents. Blurring the tops of the glass show-cases with his breath and staring till his eyes ached.

Derrick was in somewhat the same case. He had the impulse to rush off at once to his family to tell them of the extraordinary wisdom and mental equilibrium which were being lavished upon him, but he was restrained by the very natural wish to remain where he was until the last vestiges of earth marks had been rubbed from him.

He had been a very decent man as men go ; but the amazing sense of purity which now pervaded his being was new in his experience. It was not so much a smug consciousness and conceit in personal purity as a happy negation of all that is not directly of the spirit in its most calm and lucid moments.

Here nothing soiled and nothing tired. An immense and delicious mental activity swept one past all the earthly halting places. There was no eating or drinking or love-making. There was no sleeping, and the mere fact of existence among the lights and shadows and colours was more cleansing than the most refined species of Oriental bathing.

Life here was mental. Burning curiosities and instantaneous satisfactions thereof seemed at once the aim and the end of existence. And since there can be no limit to the number and extent of the spirit's curiosities, it was obvious that there could be no limit to existence itself. And Derrick, together with those spirits which had passed into the Place at the same time with his own, began to have a clear understanding of humanity.

Here, for instance, all that one learned about God was fact, but there was so much to learn that heaping fact on fact, with a speed unknown on earth—even in the heaping of falsehood upon falsehood—it would take from now until eternity to learn all about God.

## III

There was one thing that Derrick must be prepared to face. His wife and their three children would *look* just as they had looked when he last saw them, and as a matter of fact they would *be* just what they were ; but to him, with all his new and accurate knowledge and his inconceivably clear vision, they would seem to have changed greatly.

He had always considered his wife an intelligent, well-educated, even an advanced woman, and he had considered his children, especially the youngest, who was a girl, altogether brighter, and more precocious than his neighbour's children. Well, along those lines he must be prepared for shocks and disillusionment.

It would not be possible, for instance, to sit down with his wife to a rational discussion of anything. She would seem like a moron to him : superstitious, backward, ignorant, and stubborn as a mule. He would find her erroneous beliefs and convictions hard to change. It would be the same with the children, but in less degree. The eldest was twelve, and his brain was still capable of a little development. He would have some inclination to listen to his father and to believe what his father told him. With Sammy aged ten, and Ethel aged eight, much might be done.

He would begin by asking these young hopefuls to forget everything that had been taught them, with the exception of that one startling fact, that the world is round. He would then proceed to feed their eager young minds on as many simple and helpful truths as would be good for them, and he would show them, what was now so clear to him, how to find happiness on earth with a minimum of labour and worry.

A question carelessly thought and instantly answered caused him to return to earth sooner than he had intended.

The answer to his question had been in the nature of a hard jolt. It had to do with sin.

Sin, he learned, is not doing something which other people regard as sinful, but something which you yourself know to be sinful. Lying, theft, arson, murder, bigamy may on occasion be acts of light, charity, and commiseration, no matter how the man-mob may execrate, judge, and punish them. But the same things may be also the worst of crimes. And only the individual who commits them can possibly know. That individual doesn't even have to know. It is what he thinks that counts; not what he pretends to think, not what he swears in open court that he did think, but what, without self-deception, he actually did and does think.

And Derrick learned that if during his brief absence from them any of those earth persons whom he loved so dearly had sinned, committed some act or other which they knew for themselves to be sinful, there would be an opaque veil which neither his eyes nor theirs could pierce, nor the words of their mouths.

But he was not *greatly* worried.

As men count time he had been absent from the earth and from his loved ones only for a very short time. They would still be in the depths of mourning for him. And even if they were evilly disposed persons, which they were not, they would hardly have had time to think of anything but their grief and their loss.

#### IV

As he left the Place of the wonderful lights and shades and colours and perfumes, he realised that he could not have been *perfectly* happy, because he now perceived that by the mere act of leaving it behind he had become still happier, and that perfect happiness could only be his when he reached "home" and beheld his loved ones.

When he had been taken from his home to the hospital the buds on the pear trees had been on the point of bursting. The pear trees would be in full bloom now. When he had been taken away, the shutters of the house had been taken from their hinges, painted a pleasant apple-green and stood in the old carriage-house to dry. They would be back on their hinges now, vying in smartness with the two new coats of white paint which the painters had been spreading over the low rambling house itself. How sweet the house would look among the fresh young greens of spring ! Perhaps the peewees who came every year had already begun to build in the veranda eaves.

The little river which tumbled over the old mill dam and for a mile flowed tranquilly on with little slipping rushes through his farm, would be very full of water now. It would be roaring and foaming among the rocks at the foot of the dam. The elms which shaded the bridge and the ford beside it would be at their best, before the leaves became worm-eaten and cobwebby. Perhaps one of the cars would be in the ford to its hub getting washed, with one of the children sitting in the front seat. The dark blue roadster with the special body looked especially gay and sporty in the ford under the shadow of the elms.

He had no more than time to think these things before he had come to the end of his journey.

Home had never looked so inviting. The garden was bounded on the south by a little brook ; and beyond this was a little hill planted with kalmia and many species of native ferns.

It was on the top of this hill that he lighted, and here he paused for a while and filled his eyes with the humble beauty of the home which his earth mind had conceived and achieved.

Beyond the garden carpeted with jonquils and narcissis, between and above graceful pyramids of pear blossoms, the house, low and rambling, with many chimneys, gleamed in the sunlight. It was a heavenly day.

From the hill he could see not only the house, but to the left the garage and beyond that the stable. It was about eleven o'clock in the morning, and it seemed queer to him that at that hour and at that season there should be no sign of life anywhere. Surely the gardener and his assistant ought to be at work. He turned a puzzled and indignant glance back upon the garden, and he observed a curious phenomenon.

A strip of soil in the upper left-hand corner of the garden was being turned and broken by a spade. Nearby a fork was taking manure from a wheelbarrow and spreading it over the roots of a handsome crab apple.

Both the spade and the fork appeared to be performing these meritorious acts without the aid of any human agency.

And Derrick knew at once that McIntyre, the gardener, and Chubb, his assistant, must, since his departure, have sinned in their own eyes, so that they could now no longer show themselves to him, or he to them.

He started anxiously toward the house, but a familiar sound arrested him.

The blue roadster, hitting on all its cylinders, came slowly out of the garage and descended the hill and crossed the bridge and honked its horn for the mill corner and sped off along the country road toward Stamford *all by itself*.

There was nobody in the roadster. He could swear to that.

And this meant, of course, that Britton, the chauffeur, had done something which he knew that he ought not to have done, and was for ever separated from those who had gone beyond.

When Derrick reached the house he was in an exceedingly anxious state of mind. He stepped into the entrance hall and listened. And heard no sound. He passed rapidly through the master's rooms downstairs and upstairs. In the sewing room a thread and needle was mending the heel of a silk stocking, but there did not seem to be anybody in the room.



He looked from the window and saw two fishing poles and a tin pail moving eagerly toward the river. The boys, perhaps. Oh, what *could* they have done to separate themselves from him? The window was open and he called and shouted, but the fishing poles and the tin pail kept on going.

He went downstairs, through the dining-room and into the pantry.

His heart stood still.

On tiptoe on the seat of a chair stood his little girl, Ethel. Her hair shone like spun gold. She looked like an angel. And his heart swelled with an exquisite bliss; but before he could speak to her and make himself known, she had reached down something from the next to the top shelf and put it in her mouth.

At that instant she vanished.

He lingered for a while about the house and gardens, but it was no use. He knew that. They had all sinned in some way or other, and therefore he was indeed dead to them, and they to him.

Back of these stables were woods. From these woods there came a sudden sound of barking. The sound was familiar to Derrick, and thrilled him.

"If I can hear Scoop," he thought, "Scoop can hear me."

He whistled long and shrill.

Not long after, a little black dog came running, his stomach to the ground, his floppy silk ears flying. With a sob, Derrick knelt and took the little dog in his arms.

"Oh, Mum!" called Ethel. "Do come and look at Scoopie. He's doing all his tricks by himself, just as if somebody was telling him to do them."

The two looked from a window, and saw the little dog sit up and play dead and roll over—all very joyously—and jump as if through circled arms. Then they saw his tail droop and his head droop and left hind leg begin to scratch furiously at

his ribs. He always *had* to do that when anyone scratched his back in a particular place.

When Derrick returned to the Place of the wonderful lights and shadows he was very unhappy and he knew that he must always be unhappy.

"Instead of coming to this Place," he said to himself, "knowing what I know now, I might just as well have gone to Hell."

A voice, sardonic and on the verge of laughter, answered him.

"That's just what you did."

PETER FLEMING

*Felipe*



## FELIPE

THERE was no glass in the windows of the prison. With an effort—for a month's confinement had wasted his strength—Felipe hoisted himself up by the bars till his elbows rested on the broad sill and his feet dangled clear of the ground. The sun was just up, but there was no one yet in the square except four Indians boiling coffee and eating their eternal, leathery *tortillas* under the florid portico of the Teatro Nacional, where no one ever acted plays. Munching, their flat, bony faces contemplated without resentment, pleasure, or any sort of curiosity the new and shining day. Felipe lowered himself to the ground.

"This time to-morrow," he thought.

He was going to be shot to-morrow, for killing the President. He had also, but without malice, killed the President's wife's brother, a nasty little man, whom everyone disliked. His judges had almost commended him for that; in the old days they might have let him off altogether, especially as the new President was an amiable, well-spoken man, and had promised to build a public racecourse in his park, though the horses of Carrayala were notoriously neither fleet nor emulous. But nowadays it was different; nowadays people minded terribly about the look of things. This was because of the Americans who came to Carrayala and talked very seriously about civic ideals and law and order, perhaps because they could not talk very seriously about them at home.

Felipe yawned. He noticed with pride that it was a sleepy yawn, and not a nervous yawn.

Carrayala City is five thousand feet above sea-level, and you sleep badly with no glass in the window, because of the cold. He looked listlessly round the cell. Tomás the sentry was asleep on the floor outside; you could hear his snores, and a little scratching noise as some buckle on his heaving stomach rubbed against the door. Tomás slept practically all the time and was far the most reliable of the guards; he would lie down in a strategic position and sleep for hours on end, instead of drinking, or losing money to the prisoners at *pachuca*, or being too brutal to them, or too friendly. Felipe knew that it was a compliment to have that stertorous lump of oblivion outside his door; it showed his importance.

His importance mattered a great deal to Felipe. He had a keen sense of the dramatic, partly innate, and partly acquired from the films. There was a picture-house in Carrayala, named by its American manager, more aptly than he knew, after the all-conquering Cortes; they changed the programme twice a week, which was quite enough for Felipe, who knew a good thing when he saw one, and never minded seeing it again.

It was this sense of the dramatic that had sustained Felipe since his arrest, and was indeed partly responsible for making him an assassin. He had had a hard time. His own trial had been comparatively short, and he had been too joyously preoccupied with cutting a good figure to be greatly bothered by the reality of its implications.

But for days afterwards, before a lamentably reduced audience, they had put him through a cross-examination about Flores. Flores, Felipe's accomplice, was a dangerous man, with a habit of doing dangerous things. They wanted his blood much more than they wanted Felipe's. The new President looked like a good investment, but with Flores about any President was more of a speculation than an investment.

However, Flores had been first over the wall at the end of the Palace gardens ; and he was not the man to lose a lead. So they cross-questioned Felipe with spasmodic brutality, having learnt something of third-degree methods from Rivers, now second-in-command of the Carrayalan army, but once an East-side politician in New York, and many other things besides : as dirty a worker as you could wish to find.

Felipe, who had secretly disliked Flores a great deal and feared him more, endured all this in a way that surprised them. He did not look to be—and was not—made of very stern stuff ; and they did not realise that they were dealing, not with a weak man, but with a fat part. Felipe, who could not, even in his law-abiding days, walk down the street, or order a drink, or enter a room unhistrionically, now found himself intoxicatingly translated to a leading role. Calling for no very subtle interpretation, the part was built up of those broad theatrical effects which were the common currency of Felipe's imagination. His situation struck him as an opportunity rather than a predicament. He gave a workmanlike performance.

But there had come moments, lately, when he had been near the breaking-point. The hard, familiar faces of his judges, the soiled and tiresome splendour of the room they sat in—here was no gallery worth playing to : and Felipe was gradually reduced, as in the old days, to applauding, unaided, his own performance. Never, be it said, did he come to doubt the discernment of that faithful *claque* which had always so enjoyed his progress down the street, his ordering of a drink, or his entrance into a room. But his self-esteem felt the need of reinforcement from outside ; he yearned for the limelight, and thought wistfully of his trial, remembering the thrilled femininity of the back benches.

And so it came curiously about that he began to look forward to his execution. That, he knew, would be a public

event ; it had considerably been fixed for a Sunday. Everyone would be there. Felipe was delighted when he heard they were going to clean out the market square ; this had never, to his knowledge, been done before, though the Indians, who came there to chaffer once a week, sometimes carried loads of litter away with them when conditions got too bad. He began to visualise the scene, and in time built up a picture of it in minute detail, a brilliant piece of imaginative realism. This picture was never far from his mind : he saw it always when he went to sleep, and would sometimes add, from the sweepings of his dreams, a face, a shadow, or a bit of colour to the crowded canvas. There were times when he almost forgot on which side of the grave he stood, and would gloat, as if in retrospect, over the staging of his death.

He hardly knew whether he was looking back or forward on that sun-drenched scene—the crowds packing three sides of the square : the important families, in their traditional Sunday black, filling the front ranks, a sombre and impressive margin to the flashy, American-made clothes of the smaller townspeople : at the back the rich and exquisite rags of the Indians : a few shrill, excited little boys perched among the stucco machicolations of the Post Office, a magnificent building.

He heard, as though from some distance, the murmurous swell of talk : the loud—but surely perfunctory, impatient—cheers as the President and his people filed awkwardly on to the narrow balcony of the Teatro Nacional : and then the sudden hush, the barked commands, the tramp of feet, as his escort swung out of the Calle de Verano.

The last picture of all was the most vivid. Himself, slim, erect, with eyes unbandaged and a smile upon his lips, against a white wall (he could feel its warmth and roughness against his knuckles) : twenty paces away the firing-party in their dark green uniforms : for some reason they seemed squat,



foreshortened, ignominious little figures, as though stunted by the pressure of the crowd's dislike. Again a barked command; the rattle of bolts: complete silence, with only the wheeling pigeons' clatter to emphasise, not break it. And then. . . . A great sigh went up from the crowd. Above his crumpled, but not ungraceful, corpse a little cloud of dust hung in the air, where the bullets had struck the plaster. . . .

There was a curtain for you! With that in prospect, the painful *longeurs* of the third act hardly mattered. It never occurred to Felipe that he was being brave. Though he knew that that crumpled figure had excelled in courage, it did not occur to him that it was his courage. In fact, Felipe had to all intents and purposes ceased to exist: he had lost touch with himself. Now, as he stood listlessly on the dirty prison floor, he was thinking of himself in terms of the cell, not of the cell in terms of himself. Reality had slipped away into the wings. Felipe stood up-stage and bayed the limelight, unappalled.

Presently Tomás came in, bringing breakfast, also some water to wash in; Felipe, something of a dandy, had created a precedent in the prison by demanding it. Breakfast normally consisted of half a dozen *tortillas* impaled on a dirty stick and a tin mug of good coffee (coffee in Carrayala is always good). To-day there was something extra.

"*Frijoles*," said Tomás; he was one of those men who seem to have a grudge against their voice, the words they use, and human speech in general; but this morning his growl was not unkindly. He unwrapped a piece of newspaper, disclosing a dark, shapeless lump, of the colour and consistency of peat. *Frijoles* are black beans, pulped into a kind of pungent relish.

"A thousand thanks, Señor Tomás," cried Felipe, genuinely delighted, and lapsing unconsciously into the grand manner. Even the supers were coming up to scratch; the Kindly Gaoler. . . .

Tomás stared at his prisoner with remote, bleary-eyed curiosity, grunted and went heavily out. Always easily puzzled by small things, he could not understand why he had been called Señor; it worried him.

Felipe enjoyed his breakfast; the *tortillas* were quite hot, not stiff and cold as usual. He smeared them with *frijoles* and munched vigorously, regretting only that Tomás had left him no opening for a speech of thanks.

Presently they came and fetched him for the last cross-examination. He marched between eight carabinieri out through the prison patio, up the street, then to the left, and in, by the side door, to the Ministry of Agriculture. Though he had done this every day for over a fortnight, he still savoured the random publicity of the short journey, and could have kicked the soldier on the left of the leading file who spoilt the picture by getting out of step. The sun was high now, and there was a fair sprinkling of passers-by.

They all gaped satisfactorily, and made sibilant, excited comments; except the Indians, who loped by at their curious gliding trot with only an oblique flicker of interest in their eyes, unable to turn their heads because the perilously tall loads on their backs were balanced by a coloured strap across their temples.

Waiting outside the room where they examined him, Felipe had a momentary qualm; he was afraid they would make a special effort to-day to find out about Flores. He felt suddenly weary, and was peevishly aware that the *frijoles* had given him indigestion: this he considered a most unnecessary and incongruous trick for fate to play on him, and so indeed it was.

At last a command was shouted from inside the room. A sentry flung open the folding doors, and the escort marched in under the outrageous heraldry of the Carrayalan coat of arms.

The long room was filled with an ominous yellow light, like that which sometimes precedes a thunderstorm; sickly, moth-eaten blinds had been drawn down against the sun. At the far end, behind a table with an imitation marble top, sat the committee of judges. Seeing them, Felipe got the shock for which, he realised, he had instinctively been waiting. There had always been four: to-day there were five.

The Minister of Agriculture was there, though it was doubtful if even he could have told you why; a man immensely fat, and constantly sweating; a great talker, and always on every committee, where his presence was tolerated because he had a knack of eventually getting things done, and because he was a good fellow.

Miguel Diaz was there—a dry, talented little lawyer; very thorough for a Latin American, but never able to convince himself that he had been thorough enough, and therefore dilatory and often depressed. One of his ears stuck out much more than the other, because of his habit of plucking it forward when he was thinking.

Rivers was there, a man with a big jowl and truculent eyes. He wore his uniform badly and talked Spanish without attempting the accent; but this was all part of his truculence. He had the swagger of the bully, not the dandy. He smoked puros, the rank native cigars, and spat without artistry. There was a signet ring on one of his fingers; he usually said he killed an Englishman for it in Rio, but there were several other stories, all good.

The fourth was Juan de la Torre who called himself a lawyer; he was the weakest man there and the cruellest. His face was handsome in a flaccid, sensual fashion, but marked by the smallpox. He wore a high, stiff collar, having scarred the

back of his neck with some chemical, while trying to dye his hair. He used scent, but sat as far as possible from Rivers, who had told him not to.

These four, though Rivers was often absent, had been Felipe's inquisitors. Now there was a fifth man at the table. Felipe stared at him curiously.

Stephen Raddington's eyes were mild, and of a faded, unimpressive grey. When he was in the Tropics scarcely anybody realised this, because he wore large, enigmatic blue spectacles against the sun. The rest of his features were commendably hawk-like ; with his iron-grey hair and tanned skin he would have done credit to any magazine illustration. Looking at him, you were impressed, if not intimidated ; and Stephen Raddington, who was a sensitive and observant man, always noticed this.

As a result, he lived in a state of considerable perplexity. His impressions of his external self he got from two sources : from the shaving-mirror, where he saw those timid, watery eyes, the centres of pallid oases in a desert of unnatural tan : and from his own conversation, which was conducted in a high-pitched, rather soothing voice. He could not see that the blue glasses invested him with an air of inscrutability, from which his dove-like tones borrowed a veiled menace that they were never intended to convey. His ineradicable diffidence was taken for a baleful assurance. Ingenuous to a fault, Stephen Raddington found his personality strangely misconstrued.

He had been a schoolmaster in Sheffield for eight years. Then, his health breaking down and a legacy cropping up, he had come to Central America to write a careful book on the Mayan civilisation. His presence on the board of inquisitors he owed solely to his politeness.

The new President had thought he would be interested, and Stephen had not liked to disillusion him.

Besides, he was interested, though rather appalled. A great observer of his fellow-men, Stephen knew far more about human nature than he realised. His was essentially a working knowledge, in the best sense of the expression, and unbiased by any preconceived ideas on the subject: except one. Stephen Raddington was never able wholly to convince himself that he was right; so that his admirable flair for human nature served him about as well, for practical purposes, as a flair for Greek iambics.

He eyed Felipe now with embarrassed pity. He felt uncomfortable himself, and saw that Felipe, behind his flamboyant nonchalance, was uncomfortable, too. Hardly surprising, he thought; going to be shot to-morrow. Poor devil. . . . He shifted awkwardly in his chair.

He would have been astonished if he had been able to read the interpretation Felipe put upon his personality. Intrigued by this addition to his audience, and stimulated by the opportunity of winning fresh sympathies or defying fresh hostility, Felipe was nevertheless dubious. Here was a tough nut to crack; behind the malevolent blank of those blue glasses he imagined narrow piercing eyes. The careless, unimpressive way the man settled himself in his chair hinted at conscious power. Still, it was all grist to the mill of Felipe's dramatic sense; and there was really very little left of Felipe except his dramatic sense.

The cross-examination began. Its tempo was quicker than usual, its atmosphere more tense; the third act was nearing a climax. At first, Felipe was magnificent. Hot in defiance: indomitably sullen: suavely and scornfully evasive: sometimes courteous and resigned. He mocked his judges indirectly, by treating so lightly the pass they had brought him to.

To-day, for the new man's benefit, he even revived the suggestion of a deep friendship behind his loyalty to Flores; he gave them glimpses of it—little pegs for sentimental

deduction—by allowing himself here and there a break in the voice, a bitten-off betrayal of warmth. He had lately dropped this motif from his repertoire ; its effect on the bored tribunal had always been negligible, and its implied support of another candidate for the limelight was not wholly to his taste. But it was worth trying on the newcomer. Felipe over-acted grossly.

Actually, they gave him a worse time than ever before : they were making the most of their last chance. Once Rivers leant forward and hit him hard across the mouth ; and they sent the sergeant out for a whip, though they did not use it. Felipe came gradually nearer the breaking-point. He felt weak and dizzy ; the realities of martyrdom were closing in on him. In another moment he would have told them how Flores came every evening to the Cantina de los Cuatro Vientos, and sometimes slept there.

But then they made a mistake : quite a pardonable mistake, but a fatal one. They all saw how near they were to getting what they wanted ; de la Torre, thinking to press home their advantage, lost it for them altogether. For some minutes he had held back from the rapping crescendo of their questions, letting his imagination play upon the scene, savouring it nastily.

Suddenly he stood up, thumping the table with a thick, white hand. There was silence, save for the irregular rasping of the prisoner's breath. Then, in a soft, compelling voice, Juan de la Torre began to speak of what would happen on the next day ; of the market-square, the crowds, the firing party. . . .

It was a conventional, not a very vivid, picture that he drew ; but it served to defeat its purpose. In Felipe's mind his own vision of the scene, forgotten in his agony, sprang once more to life—comforting, strengthening, at all costs to be achieved. His body stopped quivering. He drew himself up. He was at bay again, no longer cornered.

They could do nothing more with him. Late in the afternoon he was sent back to his cell, still under sentence of death ; still with everything to look forward to. . . .

Tired and angry, the committee of judges adjourned to the nearest cantina. Garrulous even in defeat, it was some time before they asked Stephen Raddington for his opinion.

He looked—uneasily, though they did not know it—from one to the other. The blue spectacles lent him a sphinx-like, oracular air.

“You really wish to know what I think ?” he asked. His correct Castilian Spanish sounded oddly in their ears.

“Yes,” they said. Stephen Raddington did not believe them.

“There is only one thing,” he said, in his high, gentle voice, “that will make that young man betray his accomplice. He does not fear the death you are offering him. But send to him and say that he will be executed to-morrow in private : that he will be shot in the prison yard in the presence only of yourselves and, I suppose, a priest. Then he will tell you what you want to know.”

They took him, to his unbounded surprise, at his word. His mild assurance made them realise how much they had blustered, how much relied on bluster : he impressed them enormously. They did not even ask him how he knew, but said good-bye to him with fulsome gratitude, as though for something already accomplished. He was going down to the coast next day, to decipher *stelæ* in a swamp.

They arrested Flores that night, acting on information given them by Felipe, and shot him a week later.

If you go to Carrayala you are almost bound to see, at the corner table of the Cantina de la Vittoria (which is the only

one with pretensions to exclusiveness), a man in a blue and silver uniform, five times as magnificent as any worn in the Carrayalan army.

He will be the centre of a flatteringly silent group, and even though you do not join it you will hear him (for he talks in a remarkably loud and dramatic voice) praising a man who used to be a friend of his ; though to his courage and his magnanimity, it appears, no words can do full justice. Several years ago, when he, Felipe, lay under sentence of death for an affair in which their political principles had involved both of them, this incomparably high-souled comrade, this never sufficiently to be lamented friend, had come forward at the eleventh hour : had taken the whole blame upon himself ; and had secured, at the cost of his own life, the liberation of the present speaker from a death as terrible as it was ignominious.

It is a moving recital. At its conclusion Felipe will rise, finish his drink, square his padded shoulders, and go out. On your way back to the hotel you will see him, immobile and resplendent in the sunshine, outside the big new cinema they have built on the site of the Teatro Nacional, where no one ever acted plays. Felipe is commissioner there.



PHYLLIS BOTTOME

*Spellbound*



## SPELLBOUND

MRS. JOHN BLAKE loved her husband with a massive, proprietary affection.

It would have been incredible to her not to love him ; partly because she thought husbands should be loved by their wives and partly because John was a very good husband.

When Mary first fell in love with John she thought : "If this is not like John, it must be wrong." But after a few years of inseparable companionship her formula unconsciously varied. She did not say : "Because it is like John it cannot be right" ; but what reminded her of John did not always interest her so much as what failed to remind her of him.

They had no children, and as they were both good swimmers they invariably spent their holidays together by the sea.

One year, when John had been making rather more money than usual, he suggested that they should go abroad for their holiday. They had often gone abroad before as far as France, but no farther.

They liked the French plages, where the bathing is made as attractive as possible, and falling in love and swimming seem to be the same thing, but they thought they had better not go any farther south.

However, this year John could not take his holiday before October, so that as the sea is much warmer in foreign countries, John suggested their going to the island of Capri, where he had been told that they could bathe if they liked

up till Christmas. Mrs. Blake thought it a splendid idea, but not very like John.

After a good time, when all the arrangements were made, the idea had grown so unlike John that Mary thought it was her own.

"I have persuaded my husband," she told all her friends triumphantly, rather as if John were a kind of juggernaut under whose wheels her wishes were usually slaughtered—"I have persuaded my husband to take me to Capri. Isn't it wonderful?"

Mary found Capri quite as wonderful as she had expected. The rocky, brilliant island suggested to her fertile imagination illicit love affairs, sirens and mysterious adventures. John thought the hotel bills large but the swimming uncommonly good.

There was an English church on the island; an arrow pointed the way to it, down a shady lane between cacti; and whenever Mary saw a staid married couple like themselves, she would point them out to John and say: "Look, dear; I am sure there is something not quite right about those two!" even if they were following the arrow.

The odd thing about Capri was the light; it struck up through the earth and permeated the leaves, from beneath as well as from above. On the floor of the sea were zigzag rainbows; the water, however deep it was, shone clear like a precious stone; the sea was not all one colour—there were strips of jade green and gentian blue; and the mild azure of a child's eyes.

Everyone lived in bathing-clothes; they swam, floated and darted here and there over the clear surface of the sea in tiny little cockleshell boats called *sandoli*. The water was as satin-smooth as the skin of a grape, and the air was the colour of light golden wine.

Mary did not speak any Italian, but she thought that some

of the men who came from Naples looked like the bronze statues in the museums, and that it was a pity John did not.

One night the still weather vanished. A *scirocco* sprang up and shrieked across the sea ; the wind flung itself upon the waters till they rolled up in great blue ridges ; above them the flying foam ran separately, thrillingly white, slanting towards the land. Around the rocks the waves formed into pale green hollows, and then, with a terrifying hiss, flung themselves in broken rainbows upon the tiny beach. It was impossible to bathe, so Mary sat on the terrace in front of the little hotel and watched the sea.

It was a beautiful sight, and unlike any storm she had ever seen, because, although the air rang with the shrill voices of the wind, and the waves plunged and fell with a shattering violence, the sunshine lay just as usual on the brilliant yellow rocks of the island, and danced on the ravenous bright sea.

Mary Blake thought of a great many things ; her breakfast—she wished she could have tea instead of coffee ; Eastbourne, and how cold and grey the quiet seas of England looked compared to this mad, fluttering jewel.

She thought of men—other men than John. How strange they were ! How they did sudden wonderful things, and how, especially if they were Italians, their faces moved, and behind their faces their quick fierce minds.

Mrs. Blake was still a very pretty woman, and she had seen these foreign men look at her ; seen in their eyes what John never showed in his. She wouldn't, she supposed, have liked it if he had—at least, not in public, she said to herself, for she always tried to be reasonable : "I know what John is like. These men only interest me because I don't know what they are like. I always know exactly what John will do, and he never does anything wrong or strange—so I needn't worry. Still——"

Then she looked again at the leaping, shining sea. What

she saw puzzled her. It looked as if there was someone in the sea beyond the rocks—beyond the surf, someone swimming very indifferently. The arms would move every now and then like a doll's, then the big seas would ride above the pin-point of the head, but the swimmer did not rise to meet the wave, the head would be quite covered for a moment, and then Mary would see again the faint, twitching movements of the outstretched arms.

Mary was vaguely glad she had made John promise her not to go in. She began to feel a little uncomfortable. She got up and walked to the edge of the terrace above the rocky cove. She saw that the little beach was black with people, all watching the swimmer. They gesticulated violently as if they were all disputing what should be done. There were several men in bathing-suits waiting for the sea to go down before attempting to bathe, and they gesticulated more than the others, and talked to the fishermen who were standing in a little group together by their boats.

The feeble, enigmatic motions of the swimmer so far out alone, in this mad broken jewel, tore at Mary's heart. How lonely—how unspeakably helpless he must feel! And no one, no one moved to go out to his help.

The men in the bathing-suits were trying to persuade the fishermen to put out a boat, but the fishermen pointed at the breaking surf, at the rocks; they shrugged their shoulders, and folding their hands inside each other, showed that if you tried to launch a boat it would simply curl back under the rocks and be smashed to pieces.

Mary became breathless with excitement, for she saw one of the tiny black figures seize a rope and a life-belt and point to the sea. The fishermen again shook their heads and did incredible things with their arms to bring home to this small determined figure the implacable forces of the waves.

But the man persisted. For the first time in her life Mary

was looking at a hero ; and she thought to herself : "Oh, if only John had been that kind of man, wouldn't it have been wonderful ?"

For nothing that the fishermen said made any difference to the intrepid rescuer. He made them take an end of the rope and fasten it round his body, then he seized the life-belt and ran along the little stone pier till he reached the end. The waves were tall as houses and fell with the crash of falling stone, but there were little pauses between the crashes ; and there was just the ghost of a chance that with luck a very strong swimmer might get out before they had time to catch him and throw him back against the rocks.

Mary felt her whole body tense behind her eyes, as if she too were about to make that dreadful spring.

He waited for a long minute, for two long minutes. Was he afraid after all ? Did he see now that the attempt was impossible ? But he was only timing the waves, for even as she held her breath he sprang.

For a time Mary could see nothing but spray and the convulsed, gesticulating crowd on the beach, then she saw that there was a second little black head out in the waves, moving very slowly away from the pier.

There were moments when she thought the head bobbing on the water was as still as a pin stuck into a pin-cushion, but if she looked at the end of the pier and then at the head, she saw that the band of violet blue sea between them was widening. The little feeble figure was still visible, ducking down under the waves, but, even as Mary's agonised eyes rested on it, the tossed, living creature ceased to move its arms.

Mary could bear no more. She felt too sick to stand. She went to her room and prayed, face downwards on the bed.

She wished John would come and tell her what had happened, but never since their marriage had John come when she wished ! It often seemed quite enough for her to wish it

for John simply to stay away. It was not intentional, for she knew John loved her better than anything in the world. It just happened that no spell bound them to act unseen upon each other's minds.

The man who was out now in that dreadful sea could, Mary felt sure, have wielded such a spell. She longed to see if he was still alone, but she had no strength to drag herself down to the beach to find out; and still John did not come. She felt each wave the swimmer faced roll over her. Never for one moment did Mary relax her mind; it hovered over him stroke by stroke, fighting back the enormous seas. He could not, she thought, drown while she so held him up in the passion of her prayer!

At last she heard John's slow, rather heavy steps. She kept saying to herself: "Oh, *why* doesn't he hurry! O God! Why doesn't he hurry?"

She cried out before he had crossed from the terrace through their open window.

"Oh, John! John! Are they both drowned?"

"Ah! So you've heard about it, have you, my dear?" said John. "I rather hoped you wouldn't—upsetting business—and nothing to be done about it really—those fishermen were right!"

"Oh, but tell me, tell me!" she besought him; "then he *is* dead."

She turned and looked up at John. He was dressed as usual, but his hair was rumpled with the spray and his face had an odd patchy look as if he had been running.

He sank down heavily in an arm-chair by the bed. Mary sprang up, and brought him some brandy in their travelling-flask. She was surprised to see his hands shake as he took it from her, but however upset he was, why—oh why—wouldn't he answer her question? He was driving her mad!

"Well, that was a woman out there," he told her at last,



"not a man. I'm afraid she is dead ; but she wasn't drowned as we had all supposed. The doctor thinks not. She would have sunk if she had been drowned ; her mouth was close shut. She was never seen to open her lips after the waves caught her. She was sitting on the rocks watching them break—a fool thing to do with such a sea running ; a wave heaved in ahead of the rest and picked her off the rocks as clean as a pin ! She must have been flung back a time or two and been stunned before the seas dragged her out. Most unpleasant business. Her husband was there too !"

"Oh, that *was* her husband, then !" gasped Mary. She closed her eyes and for a moment she envied the dead woman her husband ! What would it have been like, what mad ecstasy, to know that your husband would risk those measureless, savage seas to save you ? Even while you are being dashed about in that white welter of destruction, he would be coming nearer and nearer—to save you . . . or to die with you !

John coughed uneasily.

"I don't think he was much of a swimmer," he said apologetically ; "you see, it was quite impossible for anyone but a fairly strong swimmer to get out in time before the seas plugged him, and then he'd have been smashed back against the rocks and not been much use to anyone !"

"Oh, John, do stop *not* telling me !" cried Mary. "Who was it, who was it—and is he drowned too ?"

"Not at all, not at all, my dear," said John hastily. "There wasn't very much risk for a strong swimmer, I mean with a life-preserver and roped ; the getting in was the ticklish part of it, but providing that you kept your head and were patient, it was manageable. The fishermen pointed out the best place to try. The great thing is never to be in a hurry—especially when everything else is !"

"Oh, John, don't belittle it !" said Mary almost rudely ; "how can you *know* anything about it ! I watched him ! It

was the very bravest thing I ever saw done—against enormous odds. Are you quite *sure* the man was not drowned?"

"Oh, come, Mary, you are making far too much of the whole thing," said John awkwardly. "I wouldn't, I really wouldn't have undertaken it if I hadn't seen perfectly well that it was manageable. I'm glad you didn't know it was me."

"You!" cried Mary. "Good God!"

She saw from his eyes that it had been John. He lay back against the chair as if he couldn't speak any more.

His forehead twitched nervously. He had the fighter's look after a long fight is over; when Memory, like an echo, forces her terrible images back into the brain. Only a man who had fought those seas could look as John looked. He had taken the trouble to get dressed and kept everyone away from her so that she shouldn't be frightened; but Mary thought of none of these things just then. Rage possessed her, mad rage. He had taken her happiness—her love and his—and thrown it into the sea!

"John!" she cried, "how dare you do such a thing? John, you've broken my heart! I never would have believed you could be so cruel! Oh, my God, if I'd lost you! I stood there watching you!—seeing you! I shall never get over it! It's as if you were drowned! How can I ever forgive you?"

"But really, really, Mary," said John, defensively. "It wasn't *too* much of a job. I got her in. I think I'll take just a nip more of that brandy if you don't mind."

She whirled him on to the bed. "Don't you dare stir—or speak!" she cried; and then she sat down in the chair he had been sitting in and burst into a passion of sobs.

"Oh! Oh! Oh!" she cried, "how could you do it? It was such a cruel thing to do! It might have been the end of everything!"

John smiled feebly back at her from the bed; he hardly

seemed to hear what she was saying, or else he hardly seemed to care.

There were often times when he seemed quite happy with Mary when she hadn't meant to make him happy.

"It's all right now," he whispered, soothingly.

Of course Mary was proud of John afterwards. She wrote home and told everyone how brave he had been. But she was never able to trust him in the same way again.



ERIC LINKLATER

*Country Born*



## COUNTRY BORN

SOMETIMES when it was growing late in the club bar little O'Driscoll's voice would be heard in the richness of its native brogue. At ordinary times he spoke like ordinary mortals who have been educated in the ordinary English way, and during business hours—he was in the Bombay office of the West of India Bank—his sentences were sedulously clipped and his intonation was as smooth as a pebble.

But with one peg over the statutory eight a rhythm would creep into his voice and a luxuriance into his syntax such as are familiar to students of the Irish theatre. There was almost certainly a literary quality in the accent which fell on him like a flame (will-o'-the-wisp or pentecostal) at that hour when well-behaved people have dressed for dinner, and the others are coming to the conclusion that after another short one a steak at Green's would suit them better than anything else.

And yet with a name like Jerry O'Driscoll can anyone blame a man for encouraging the gentle growth of an Irish accent? It lent point to his stories, apparent subtlety to his repartee, and a warmth to all his jokes.

O'Driscoll played inside-right for the Gymkhana hockey XI with the characteristic dash and brilliance of an Irish forward, and on the day they defeated the Poona team in the final of the Presidency Cup Tournament it was his goal, cleverly taken from a short corner, that won the match five minutes from time.

There was a dinner afterwards—a hilarious dinner—and

O'Driscoll sang "The Wearing o' the Green" and "The Old Sidecar," and then—by request, as restaurant orchestras complacently put it—he told his famous and shameless story of the fabulous Duchess of Kilkenny and the mythical Major O'Gorman. "Sure, and is it a man ye are at all, Major O'Gorman?" the Duchess asks at a critical stage of the history; and there was the inherited wealth of all histrionic disdain in O'Driscoll's voice as he put the question to his other hand. And when the story reached its appointed end, a roar of laughter swelled and spread through the room, and shook the echoing glasses before it died away to chuckling ripples of mirth and the comparative silence of general talk.

But India is an unchancy land where you may drink cheerfully with a man one week and write letters of condolence to his widow the next, and on the Thursday following the dinner, which was on a Sunday, O'Driscoll went to hospital, where the Civil Surgeon removed, or evacuated, or did whatever was appropriate to, an abscess in his liver.

Jerry took his anæsthetic badly, and he had to be given more chloroform and ether than a doctor cares to give. The operation was successful, but there was anxiety in the hospital after it, and a nurse was continually inside the barrier of tall blue screens which surrounded the little man's bed.

He was very weak when the chloroform wore off, and when Manderson, who lived with him, and who had been waiting at the hospital most of the morning, tried to see him about midday, he was told uneasy things about saline injections and the danger of collapse. But the saline did its work, and later, when Manderson asked him how he felt, he said:

"Not half as bad as I did the morning after the hockey dinner, old man," and grinned feebly beneath the ice-pack balanced on his head.

At night Jerry seemed stronger, and in the morning he was cheerful and comparatively comfortable. But the follow-



ing night his temperature ran up suddenly, his breathing grew heavy and fast, and his face was flushed and puffy. What the doctors feared had happened, and pneumonia had set in.

They telephoned to Manderson at four o'clock in the morning, and when he arrived, Jerry was breathing quickly from the mouth of a glass funnel with a length of rubber tubing connected to an oxygen cylinder.

"And what are ye doin' here at this time o' night?" said Jerry excitedly, his eyes bright with fever.

"It's nearly breakfast-time, old fellow," said Manderson pacifically.

"The devil it is," said Jerry. "I've never seen such a rotten *bandobast* as this since I came to—since I came to India," he shouted with unreasonable defiance; or tried to shout, for his voice broke and he whispered, "O God!" very low, and then he seemed to sleep a little.

Manderson tiptoed out and sat in the waiting-room at the end of the ward. Across the veranda the blackness of the night and the brightness of the stars were fading together; the sky was growing pale at the first distant threat of dawn. He rang up O'Driscoll's Burra Sahib, and Atkinson and another man or two who were his friends, more because of loneliness than for anything they could do. They said they would come down to the hospital very soon.

Gradually the sky lightened, and grey that would turn in a minute to saffron took the place of darkness. Manderson watched the day coming with something of that feeling with which one waited for dawn in France during the war years. There was something like fear and something like hope in his waiting. He thought at times that with the sun strength would come to Jerry, and that if he lived for one day he might live for another.

When the sun was just below the horizon the buildings in the middle distance grew startlingly black and hard, as

though they were made of gaunt black girders, and the sky looked more and more immeasurably remote and fragile, like very thin muslin over an enormous greenish bowl that was quite empty. Then, as the light became suddenly certain, a white-faced sister came hurrying, and Manderson's heart sank.

It has been said—though most men die without asking for anybody—that a dying man will most often call for his mother, and Manderson thought of this as he followed the nurse, and tried to remember whether it was Cork or Kerry that O'Driscoll came from; one or the other, he thought, but he was not certain.

Jerry was quieter and the fever seemed to have gone. His face was drawn and there were hard lines on it.

"Manderson," he said, "for God's sake go and get my mother, for I'm dying and she doesn't know."

He spoke sensibly enough, but Cork is six thousand miles and more from Bombay, and Manderson choked and stammered as he tried to tell him so.

"Don't be a fool," said O'Driscoll desperately, "she's here, within a mile of me, and, O God! I want her"; and his hand caught wildly at the sheet which covered him.

Manderson said: "There, there, old man," and felt foolish, and O'Driscoll, coughing weakly, replied: "Damn you, she's living here, I tell you." And he gave an address in Byculla, which is a district of Bombay where few Europeans live, and very few of the privileged class known as "Club members."

Manderson, bewildered, made some remark about Cork, but O'Driscoll said again with an effort: "She's there, I tell you, an' it's nearly too late."

It was the Sister who said at last: "All right, Mr. O'Driscoll, we'll send a taxi along now and she'll be here in no time," and beckoned Manderson out into the corridor.

"Write a note and give it to your driver, if you've got a car, and send him to that address," she said. "It'll do no good, but if his mother's there she's got a right to see him die."

"But he's Irish, and his mother's in Cork," replied Manderson limply.

The Sister looked at him and considered for a moment. "Are you sure?" she asked.

"He always said so," said Manderson.

"You'll find his mother at that address, unless I'm very far mistaken," said the Sister a little grimly, "and I think you'll find that he's country-born." She was a widow, and maybe knew more about the country born—English people born in India with an anna in the rupee or so of native blood in their veins—than Manderson did. Or maybe Jerry's voice, when he was raving a little, had lost its Irish accent and taken on the sing-song *chi-chi* tone of the country instead.

Anyway, Manderson wrote his note and his car went to the address in Byculla, and Manderson was left to ponder and rake his memory as deep as he could for all that O'Driscoll had told him of his people and his birth. He found that it was not very much. Once O'Driscoll had said something about Trinity College, Dublin, and Powell, who had spent many years there getting his Rugger Blue and, in the end, a somewhat gratuitous M.B., asked in astonishment: "Why, when were you up?"

"I wasn't," O'Driscoll answered very gravely. "Borstal was my Alma Mater, and it's brought me more friends than you'd credit—especially in business circles in Bombay," and he winked portentously.

"Old Borstalians!" someone had shouted, and the toast was drunk noisily.

"You can talk of your Eton and House and the playing fields that Waterloo was won on, but, bedad!"—O'Driscoll had taken his cue and was holding the stage—"Bedad! it's the playing fields of Borstal that second Ypres was won on—or lost, for be damned if I can remember which it was."

He had gone home some time in 1915 and been given a

commission in the—Munster Fusiliers, was it?—Manderson could not remember. He had been wounded, once at any rate, and he had come back to Bombay shortly after the Armistice. That was certain; but his earlier life, like the Dark Ages, was lighted only by hearsay and uncertain reference.

There were many people you knew whose histories went back to the war, but no further. A temporary commission had been a sort of social birth certificate, and the necessary gestation previous to it was often enough forgotten. The twice-born castes have their privileges everywhere.

“God knows!” Manderson said to himself, and watched the sun, now insolently radiant above the white buildings. A crow, lean, black, and beggarly, perched clumsily on the window-sill and eyed him furtively.

The Sister came in to him. “They’re here,” she said, and her lips tightened.

He got up.

A fat, ungainly woman, her dark, sallow cheeks quivering as she walked, came down the corridor. A girl, slim and strangely like Jerry, was at her side; her face was heavily powdered and she was trying to muffle her sobs. Behind them were another woman, fat, too, with her hat astray over black, untidy hair, and a small beady-eyed boy.

“Oh, Gerald,” said the first woman; “where is my Gerald? It was nice of you, indeed, Mr. Manderson, to help him as you could, but why did you not tell me before about him?”

Manderson cleared his throat, and the Sister said: “I think perhaps you had better see him alone, Mrs. O’Driscoll. Too many people would be bad for him. He is very ill, you know.”

The girl started to cry loudly, but the mother said: “Hush, Tessie,” and went with the Sister. The other fat woman said: “It is so sad, Mr. Manderson, is it not? For Gerald was so popular, and now is he going to die?”

"I think you had better wait here a little," replied Manderson uncertainly, and led them into the waiting-room.

The sight of them, so obviously country born—Anglo-Indians, half-castes, he thought, and shuddered at the ugly name—made him feel cold and numb. Poor old Jerry; he remembered the slighting things that were said about such people as these, the jokes that were made about them, the heartless jokes that were, some of them, so terribly true to facts. There was that one about the country-born girl who, from the depths of illicit embraces on an agitated couch, said resignedly: "Oh, Mr. James, indeed, you are such a flirt!" Surely Jerry had told that one himself. And it was as though it was his sister of whom he had told it.

Manderson considered her unhappily. She was pretty, short and pliant, with big dark eyes, and the sort of helpless allure of her kind. Her lips, half open, were darkish red against the faintly yellow pallor of her face. . . . The small boy stared at him. His forehead bulged, and his mouth was stupidly open. These were Jerry's blood relations.

He would have been eligible for none of the clubs had it been suspected that he was country born, and the mere suggestion of relationship with one of these people would have damned him for ever. It was a cruel system, this social philosophy of Englishmen in the East, but looking at the woman and the disgusting small boy, Manderson could not honestly condemn it.

It was this racial fastidiousness which had saved England from the fate of Portugal. Portuguese India, that gorgeous crown of a proud and gallant nation, had become the home of cooks and menials; Goa, the city of magnificent cathedrals and unimaginable wealth, was a dilapidated ruin. And all because the Portuguese had married into India after invading it, had consummated their victory in lawful wedlock, and begotten their inspissated kind on the women they had captured

and converted. But England, avoiding conscious procreation and devoting her energies to trade and conquest, had won supremacy as the reward of continence—or better, perhaps, of discretion.

The woman tearfully began to rehearse the virtues of Gerald. He had always given his mother plenty of money—she herself was his mother's sister, and had shared in the benefits. The ivory necklace which Tessie wore was a present from him on her last birthday. Of course, they had not seen very much of him lately, but "He was so very popular, was he not, Mr. Manderson? We used to be very proud when he talked about people who were rather wealthy and famous in Bombay, and whose names we saw in the papers."

"We were all very fond of Jerry," said Manderson, uncomfortably.

"There, Tessie, indeed, you should be proud of your brother, and not cry so much before Mr. Manderson. Do you think he will have a very large funeral, Mr. Manderson?"

"Oh, Auntie," sobbed the girl, and clutched a small soiled handkerchief to her eyes. A fringe of petticoat showed above her thin legs, and her narrow shoulders shook with her weeping. The small boy stood by the window.

They probably encouraged him to desert them, thought Manderson, so that they could talk proudly of his achievements to their neighbours in that queer, half-light society of the Anglo-Indian. Not that he had really deserted them, apparently, for he had given them money—a lot of money, according to the fat aunt—and that was decent of Jerry, for he was always hard up and living on February's salary in December.

It was easy to blame him, perhaps ; but Manderson pictured the house in Byculla, the noisy throng of relatives, the uneasy, proud assertions of a white ancestry, the constant defiance of Indian associations, the pathetic loyalty to an indifferent and unsympathetic rule, the squalor and dust and smell of a teeming

neighbourhood. And then he thought of the clubs, their coolness and comfort and ease. Their members might be vulgar and commonplace and ignorant, but they were white, the dominant race, and they could talk naturally of England as Home—they did not say “Going home to England,” as subconscious fear of misunderstanding made the country born say; they said “Going Home,” secure in the knowledge that everyone recognised what they meant.

And Jerry had been accepted as one of them without hesitation; he looked white enough; he had been a good fellow, a good companion; he had undoubtedly been popular even as that woman his aunt (a greasy strand of hair hung over her fat, sallow cheek, and her exuberant breast strained the shiny fabric of her blouse) had said he was.

He should be blamed, possibly; he had not honoured his father and his mother. But he had seemingly supported his mother, and heaven knew how many of her relatives, and he had flattered her maternity by his acceptance in the clubs and the bungalows of successful Europeans on Malabar Hill. Perhaps that absolved him. “I wonder,” thought Manderson. “Service is supposed to count; perhaps he’s established a precedent, and saved his soul in the Yacht Club.”

He started to his feet. They all did, the woman and the girl with renewed wailing, as Mrs. O’Driscoll came in, her face distorted with weeping.

“Oh, Tessie,” she cried, “Tessie, he’s dead.” A broken harmony of grief went up, thrown into piercing discord by the unexpected screaming of the boy. The aunt, sobbing with her mouth open and a stream of tears running down either cheek, began to pray confusedly and crossed herself mechanically and without unction. Manderson, his grief for Jerry’s death almost driven out of mind by the acute discomfort of the scene at which he was assisting, crossed to the door where the Sister stood, silent and stern of mouth.

"Was he conscious?" he asked.

"He laughed," she answered; "he sat up and laughed and lay back and was dead. I don't know whether he was properly conscious or not."

"What did he say, Mother?" sobbed the girl, her lips twisted. "Could he speak to you before he died?"

Mrs. O'Driscoll's grief quietened to sniffing and an occasional hiccup. Nobody took any notice of the small boy, who clawed at her dress, ripped open her placket and screamed hoarsely. "I don't know, Tessie," she answered. "Oh, that is honest, I don't know what he said. And now he is dead—oh, blessed Mary, he is dead, and we had no time to get the Father, and—oh! he will never say anything again!"

"Come, Mrs. O'Driscoll," said the Sister. "Try and control yourself, and do make the little boy stop crying. I'll get you some tea, and then you'll feel better."

"He said something about a Major Gorland. I think it was Major Gorland. Do you know him, Mr. Manderson? Indeed, I knew so few of his friends, and he had so many, had he not?"

"He was so popular, Tessie," said the aunt.

"He said—you know how Irish he was, Mr. Manderson; we are all Irish, you know; indeed, we were all going home to Ireland next year—he said, 'Sure, Major Gorland, is it a man I am at all, at all?' and then he sat up and laughed. And then he died. Oh, Tessie!"

"It was rather a funny thing for a dying man to say," remarked the aunt, "but perhaps Major Gorland was a very great friend of his, Mr. Manderson, was he?"

"I think he was," answered Manderson unsteadily.

The thought of that last night at the Gymkhana came to him—Jerry with one foot on the table, Hibernian *hybris* on his face, the art of the histrionic Gael in his finger-tips, the mockery of the playboy in his soul. At any rate he died as he



had chosen to live. If he was not true diamond he was amazingly good paste; there were even such things as synthetic diamonds, Manderson's sympathy suggested. . . .

"I'm afraid I must go," he said abruptly, "I'm so sorry, Mrs. O'Driscoll. Jerry was a dear soul. I shall see you afterwards, of course."

Mrs. O'Driscoll sobbed faintly and took his hand in a soft, moist embrace.

"He was so very popular, wasn't he?" said the aunt pathetically as Manderson turned and left them.



HELENA LEFROY CAPERTON

*Oblivion*



## OBLIVION

STEPPING with quakerish daintiness, the dappled grey mare bore its lovely burden beneath the creamy blossoms of the flowering locusts. Honeysuckle in full bloom mingled its own incense. Upon either side the dark cedars stood, making a cloistered aisle. Cardinals and mocking-birds sang a nuptial anthem from the hedgerow. Of wedding pomp and circumstance Nature contributed her utmost, for the girl and the young Confederate colonel had within the hour been made man and wife. Secretly and sweetly, between battles, they had plighted their troth.

The young colonel walked beside his horse, his hand on the bridle. His face was raised to the girl's, and hers bent down to his, the while her curls fell over her shining eyes and the frankness of her kisses set him to trembling.

"I wish it were over, and that your family knew. I am afraid of your mother."

"My mother will love you. You will be a daughter to her, and a comfort, while my father and I are away fighting. Have no fear, dear heart."

"Your mother is such a great lady, and I, you know what she would call me . . . poor white . . ."

"Hush, oh, hush. Let us not think of that. We have so little time. I must return within the hour. Oh, Annabelle, my love, my wife, give me added life to carry into battle."

Reaching up he drew her down beside him, holding her in an interminable kiss. One arm about her waist, and the other

through the horse's bridle, they turned aside from the road, and taking down a section of the old worn fence, they passed into the shade of pine and live oak. The woodland, though it was only high noon, deepened into twilight.

A low rumble spread, increased, and died away. It was followed by a silence, as of all sentient wild life struck dumb. The soldier raised himself on an elbow, and listened. Again it came in fuller crescendo, and was redoubled, the woods grew darker. The detonation rolled closer.

The girl turned her face to the sky.

"How strange, a thunderstorm, and the sun shining brightly."

"Yes, a thunderstorm, we must seek shelter." He knew it to be not the thunder of heaven but of guns.

The vivid intensity of desire vanished from his eyes, and in its stead a clean austerity sharpened every feature. He arose and drew her to her feet.

Something that whined fled away over their heads, cutting the young green leaves like hail. Another swooped nearer, and with a more vicious keening. With a plunge the horse dropped and rolled over.

Through the underbrush figures moved, crouched on hands and knees. Innocent looking puffs of white burst here and there. Upon one side crept men in grey, some hundred yards distant men in blue. "Thicker and faster exploded the puffs of white, more frequent the whining overhead. They were caught between two opposing forces in full battle.

In honour bound he should join these crouching figures in grey, but he must convey her to safety first, then return to his men. Sheltering her with his body, he drew her along.

"You must be brave, my dear love. You must do what I ask of you. It is our only hope."

"I will be brave, as you are brave."

"We must reach the old shot-tower. I will hide you there. Can you do this for me?"

She bowed her head.

They had reached the edge of the wood, there was a field to be crossed. On the far side rose a tower-like structure built of granite. Picking her up, he ran with her across the field. The firing became constant, the rumbling never ceased. At last he set her down before a small iron door. The hinges were rusty, the lock broken and unused. Weeds and brambles grew over the threshold. It took all his strength to pull the door open. Inside was mouldy dusk, save for a tracery of wan light filtering through slits of windows near the roof. Before them an opening in the floor showed a stone-lined hole, damp with moss and the fungi that thrives in darkness. The girl, looking down, clung to him shuddering.

Lifting her he lowered her into this pit, some fifteen feet below the ground. Kneeling, he at last let go her hands as she dropped to her feet. In the darkness her white face shone upward as a star is reflected in deep water.

"I will come back for you when the fighting is over."

"I will wait for you."

Softly and through great fear she answered him, and the words lay upon his heart as he went down into battle.

## II

We children thought the world of Uncle Powhatan. The older members of the family regarded him more or less as a responsibility; rather less, for no one took any definite charge of him. When not down in Gloucester he drifted from one household to another, always kindly treated, but received with a sigh as one takes up unwanted family obligations. Happily, the dear old man never knew this. He was glad to see his people. It never occurred to him that he might not be welcome.

And he was such a beautiful old man, even if he was a little simple and foolish. There was a daguerreotype owned by the Fredericksburg branch of the family that showed him in his uniform as a colonel of the Confederate Army. He measured six feet three in his stockinged feet. Even in the faded picture one could discern the brightness of his hair, the fine gallantry of his features.

We, the children of the whole large connection, used to be sent for the summer holidays down to the old place, set among the five Gloucester rivers. Nothing could harm us there, where the lawn sloped gently down to the dimpling North River, and we learned to become amphibious, as much at home in the water as on land. There we learned to sail a boat, careering down into Mobjack Bay, over the wide waters of the York, and so on into the Chesapeake, where, if you kept on, you would meet the Atlantic Ocean. Up each of the five rivers that form a hand, and that are called the Venice of Virginia, we fished and we swam, and always we were safe, because Uncle Powhatan was with us. In spite of his age, his physical strength was colossal.

"Lacking, unfortunate, half-witted," were the epithets more commonly used, but we did not think he lacked. We loved him for his gentle strength, his knowledge of all creatures that flew, or crept, or swam. As babies, and restless with some infantile ill, the old man would walk with us in his arms under the live oaks upon the lawn, until dawn turned the river to silver. Like as not he would be scolded for it, much to his mystification. All he knew was that if a youngling mourned it should be comforted.

We were thoughtless, of course, and we paid little attention to what had happened to Uncle Powhatan, or how he came to be as he was. We learned much later that the stately house with its Ionic columns was his birthplace. He'd been born and raised there. The oldest of us could remember Great-great-



aunt Victoria, who had been Uncle Pow's mother. Before the war, which, of course, means the war between the States, she had been mistress of the mansion and ruler over hundreds of slaves. Her portrait as a young woman was all laughing beauty, but we could only remember her as a stern old woman, worn with poverty and loss. Her men went to war when her son was eighteen and her husband less than forty. The latter she never saw alive again. Her son was brought back to her with a wound in his head. He became healed in body, but not in mind, because for ever after he could remember nothing. He could recall what happened from day to day and make himself quite useful, but of what had taken place in his life before the battle in which he had been wounded he could remember nothing.

For years after the war his mother lived God alone knows how. The family used to say, "Great-aunt Victoria doesn't know Lee has surrendered." The great place was supine under mortgages, but she never sold a portrait or a piece of silver. Dealers came and went, going down upon their knees for the treasures standing desolate in the closed rooms. Then her sister's son persuaded her to allow him to free the old place and restore it to its former glory. The clever architect had the brains to listen to her, but the interior decorators she cast into outer darkness. The landscape gardeners worked under her whip-like orders, for she remembered where every box hedge had grown, where every bleeding heart had wept in the old garden.

She enjoyed her restored comforts for a short time only before she died, and she ceased to breathe asking a favour for the first time in her indomitable life. She died begging that we take care of Powhatan. She was buried in the family burying-ground. The Abbey beneath the Cedars she had always called it, and a place was saved beside her for her son.

Of the nephews and nieces to follow Uncle Powhatan, as

the children of Hamelin town followed the Pied Piper, there was one of us who was closer, whom he seemed to love above all the others. When the summer holidays began, and in automobile loads we debouched upon the lawn, although he was delighted to see us, it was to Oliver he first disclosed the happy secrets of woodland and river. Where the fish-hawks had built their nest this year, and where the largest stone crabs for bait could be found.

Oliver himself was an enigma to us, for he did strange things. He cut up live frogs and guinea pigs, chipmunks and rabbits !

He had what he called his laboratory in the old smoke-house, and once we peeped in the window and were frozen with horror to see a rabbit strapped down upon a board. It was alive, because we could see its nose and whiskers wink, and Oliver with infinite delicacy and flashing scalpel was vivisecting it. We broke down the door and were met by a strange sweet odour, our first smell of chloroform. Oliver said the rabbit didn't know what was happening to it, and allowed us to remain and see its live, beating heart and all its insides. It was fascinating until one of the girls had to go and faint. From then on we went in awe of Oliver.

### III

And so the years passed, and we went out into the world to become successful or otherwise, but whichever way life treated us, the old place and the old man received us back in gentleness and peace.

Oliver became a surgeon. He became, in fact, one of the world's famous brain specialists. Soon after his graduation he went to Vienna, for there a miracle had been discovered by which dark minds could be made to function into light. He went over and he stayed a year, and when he came back, instead

of partaking of the welcome awaiting a distinguished son, he kept right on down to Gloucester to see Uncle Powhatan. There he remained, fishing and hunting with the old man and keeping him under observation.

Then he brought him up to Richmond and horrified the family by announcing his intention of operating on his head. He declared that when he did Uncle Powhatan would have as much sense as any of us, and a great deal more than some. They all argued against it. The old man would be like a creature from another world. Why disturb the peace he had enjoyed since the year 1864? What would he do with himself in to-day's hurly-burly? To all of which Oliver responded that he had taken it on as his responsibility, that he had seen the operation successful six times out of ten, and that, moreover, he owed it to science and to Uncle Powhatan.

When it was all over Oliver was severely criticised, but to my mind there is no doubt of his zeal, and his conviction that he was doing right in using his knowledge. The old man was in superb health. The days just before the operation were unalloyed bliss to him, for Oliver never left him, and had he told Uncle Powhatan he intended to cut off his head, he would have been answered with smiles and chuckles.

So that when the day came the old man lay down happily in the glistening operating-room, holding Oliver's hand, and vastly amused at the figures in white masks standing about him. In an hour he was back in his bed, the fine old head sealed in bandages, a nurse at either hand, and Oliver beside him, a beating intensity in his face.

The pulse was strong, there was little temperature. All was going well. It was for the moment of first consciousness, the instant of rebirth after more than half a century for which Oliver waited. Because what he had discovered was what he had always believed. The brain was whole and sound, only that tiny pressure from the wound had blotted out his normal

likeness to the rest of mankind. No reason at all why Uncle Powhatan should not enjoy his life to the utmost.

Just when all seemed going well and into the grand old face there showed signs of returning consciousness, there rang forth a cry that shook the hearts of all who heard, for Uncle Powhatan opened his eyes, and in them was the light of recovered knowledge. Looking from one utterly strange face to the other in dread and terror, he called out :

“Annabelle, Annabelle my love, I am coming. The battle is over and I am coming to get you.”

Even in his weakness it was all they could do to hold him down. It sounded like delirium, but at first there was no fever, and ever through the echoing halls rang those terrible cries.

“The old shot-tower. Merciful God ! Take your hands off me and let me get to her.”

They were forced to strap him to the bed. No words of Oliver’s were of any avail, for he did not know Oliver, or anyone else. He had awakened to a new world, awakened to strangeness and some unsupportable agony. On Oliver’s face was stamped horror. He never left the bedside, and all day and all night those cries drove into his soul. So passed the third day, and Oliver neither ate nor slept save when a nurse put food to his lips. When, under an opiate, the old man slept Oliver would fall into a doze by the bedside.

It was thus the end came. Oliver emerged a shadow of his former self. To the “I told you so’s” of the family he answered that the operation had been a success.

#### IV

We took Uncle Powhatan down to Gloucester and laid him beside his mother. It seemed too joyous a day for anyone to go out of life, even a half-witted old man. The *crêpe* myrtle rioted in every shade from cherry-red to palest pink.

The river was sapphire in the late afternoon sunshine. The fish leaped in silver curves. The family in all its ramifications were there, but, after all, it wasn't as if any of us were heart-broken—that is, no one except Oliver—so they soon turned back in a glittering line of cars to Richmond. I asked Oliver if he would get in with me, but he said no, he had something he wanted to do and was staying on.

Not being willing to leave him I resigned myself and called for white rock and ice, and got my flask out of my bag. Oliver declined to join me, and after dinner went early to bed. Soon after midnight I heard him stirring about in his room. I slipped coat and trousers over my pyjamas, stuck my feet in my shoes, and joined Oliver as he reached the front door. The moon was at the full, and he carried a shovel and pickaxe. For one horrid moment I wondered if he had further designs on Uncle Powhatan. I touched his arm.

“Look here, old man, what's the idea? Can I help?”

He turned on me in swift irritation.

“Yes, you can help by going back to bed and minding your own damn business.”

Of course I couldn't do that, things being as they were, so I followed him out between the great white columns, and over the moon-drenched lawn. Oliver crossed the lawn, and out on to the pier. Entering the boat-house, he dropped into a row-boat. We shot out into the silver of the moonlit river. Where the Ware joins the North we turned up a densely wooded inlet, and guided the boat among the rushes and lily pads. Dropping anchor, we beat our way through what seemed virgin forest, so thick was the undergrowth. We came to a meadow at the far end of which stood the old shot-tower.

The ruin was nothing new to me, we had played cops and robbers around it. What was left standing was overgrown with creepers. We never bothered it because the darkies used

to tell us it was "haunted," and as children we never let dark catch us there.

We began tearing away the heavy undergrowth and creepers matted against the stone side of the tower. Oliver worked as one possessed, and so did I, for I began to have some inkling of what we might discover. At the end of an hour's labour we found a small iron door. The moon had set and we worked by a flashlight. The masonry had fallen down before the door, so that it took all our strength to remove the great stones. So many years had passed since that door had been opened, it was all we could do, but at last one corner of the rusty iron crumbled, we inserted the end of the pick-axe, and pulled, and the door grated outward.

Oliver picked up the flashlight and stepped inside. Bats squeaked and flew about our heads in obscene circles. We directed the light downward. At our feet was a deep opening, walled about with the same granite that formed the tower. Fungus, and pale things that thrive in darkness, thrust upward.

Lying huddled in one corner, expressing even after half a century an extremity of terror, there lay that which was left for us to pity. Dropping down into the opening we leaned over the delicate tracery of bones. Oliver bent and picked up something that glinted in the light of our torch. It was a plain gold band. The inscription was still legible :

"Powhatan to Annabelle. May 7th, 1864. Always and for ever."

HUGH WALPOLE

*The Snow*





## THE SNOW

THE second Mrs. Ryder was a young woman not easily frightened, but now she stood in the dusk of the passage leaning back against the wall, her hand on her heart, looking at the grey-faced window beyond which the snow was steadily falling against the lamp-light.

The passage where she was led from the study to the dining-room, and the window looked out on to the little paved path that ran at the edge of the Cathedral green. As she stared down the passage she couldn't be sure whether the woman were there or no. Now absurd of her ! She knew the woman was not there. But if the woman was not, how was it that she could discern so clearly the old-fashioned grey cloak, the untidy grey hair, and the sharp outline of the pale cheek and pointed chin ? Yes, and more than that, the long sweep of the grey dress, falling in folds to the ground, the flash of a gold ring on the white hand. No. No. NO. This was madness. There was no one and nothing there. Hallucination. . . .

Very faintly a voice seemed to come to her : "I warned you. This is for the last time. . . ."

The nonsense ! How far now was her imagination to carry her ? Tiny sounds about the house, the running of a tap somewhere, a faint voice from the kitchen, these and something more had translated themselves into an imagined voice. "The last time. . . ."

But her terror was real. She was not normally frightened

by anything. She was young and healthy and bold, fond of sport, hunting, shooting, taking any risk. Now she was truly *stiffened* with terror—she could not move, could not advance down the passage as she wanted to and find light, warmth, safety in the dining-room. All the time the snow fell steadily, stealthily, with its own secret purpose, maliciously, beyond the window in the pale glow of the lamp-light.

Then, unexpectedly, there was noise from the hall, opening of doors, a rush of feet, a pause, and then in clear, beautiful voices the well-known strains of “Good King Wenceslas.” It was the Cathedral choir-boys on their regular Christmas round. This was Christmas Eve. They always came just at this hour on Christmas Eve.

With an intense, almost incredible relief she turned back into the hall. At the same moment her husband came out of the study. They stood together, smiling at the little group of muffled, be-coated boys who were singing, heart and soul in the job, so that the old house simply rang with their melody.

Reassured by the warmth and human company, she lost her terror. It had been her imagination. Of late she had been none too well. That was why she had been so irritable. Old Dr. Bernard was no good: he didn’t understand her case at all. After Christmas she would go to London and have the very best advice. . . .

Had she been well she could not, half an hour ago, have shown such miserable temper over nothing. She knew that it was over nothing, and yet that knowledge did not make it any easier for her to restrain herself. After every bout of temper she told herself that there should never be another—and then Herbert said something irritating, one of his silly, muddle-headed stupidities, and she was off again!

She could see now as she stood beside him at the bottom of the staircase that he was still feeling it. She had certainly half

an hour ago said some abominably rude personal things—things that she had not meant at all—and he had taken them in his meek, quiet way. Were he not so meek and quiet, did he only pay her back in her own coin, she would never lose her temper. Of that she was sure.

But who wouldn't be irritated by that meekness and by the only reproachful thing that he ever said to her: "Elinor understood me better, my dear"? To throw the first wife up against the second! Wasn't that the most tactless thing that a man could possibly do? And Elinor, that worn, elderly woman, the very opposite of her own gay, bright, amusing self? That was why Herbert had loved her, because she was gay and bright and young. It was true that Elinor had been devoted, that she had been so utterly wrapped up in Herbert that she lived only for him. People were always recalling her devotion, which was sufficiently rude and tactless of them.

Well, she could not give anyone that kind of old-fashioned sugary devotion; it wasn't in her, and Herbert knew it by this time.

Nevertheless, she loved Herbert in her own way, as he must know, know it so well that he ought to pay no attention to the bursts of temper. She wasn't well. She would see a doctor in London. . . .

The little boys finished their carols, were properly rewarded, and tumbled like feathery birds out into the snow again. They went into the study, the two of them, and stood beside the big open log-fire. She put her hand up and stroked his thin, beautiful cheek.

"I'm so sorry to have been cross just now, Bertie. I didn't mean half I said, you know."

But he didn't, as he usually did, kiss her and tell her that it didn't matter. Looking straight in front of him, he answered:

"Well, Alice, I do wish you wouldn't. It hurts, horribly. It upsets me more than you think. And it's growing on you.

You make me miserable. I don't know what to do about it. And it's all about nothing."

Irritated at not receiving the usual commendation for her sweetness in making it up again, she withdrew a little and answered :

"Oh, all right. I've said I'm sorry. I can't do any more."

"But tell me," he insisted, "I want to know. What makes you so angry, so suddenly—and about nothing at all?"

She was about to let her anger rise, her anger at his obtuseness, obstinacy, when some fear checked her, a strange, unanalysed fear, as though someone had whispered to her, "Look you ! This is the last time !"

"It's not altogether my own fault," she answered, and left the room.

She stood in the cold hall, wondering where to go. She could feel the snow falling outside the house and shivered. She hated the snow, she hated the winter, this beastly cold, dark English winter, that went on and on, only at last to change into a damp, soggy English spring.

When she urged Herbert to winter abroad—which he could quite easily do—he answered her impatiently ; he had the strongest affection for this poky dead-and-alive Cathedral town. The Cathedral seemed to be precious to him ; he wasn't happy if he didn't go and see it every day ! She wouldn't wonder if he didn't think more of the Cathedral than he did of herself. Elinor had been the same ; she had even written a little book about the Cathedral, about the Black Bishop's Tomb and the stained glass and the rest. . . .

What was the Cathedral after all ? Only a building !

She was standing in the drawing-room looking out over the dusky ghostly snow to the great hulk of the Cathedral that Herbert said was like a flying ship, but to herself was more like a crouching beast licking its lips over the miserable sinners that it was for ever devouring.

As she looked and shivered, feeling that in spite of herself her temper and misery were rising so that they threatened to choke her, it seemed to her that her bright and cheerful firelit drawing-room was suddenly open to the snow. It was exactly as though cracks had appeared everywhere, in the ceiling, the walls, the windows, and that through these cracks the snow was filtering, dribbling in little tracks of wet down the walls, already perhaps making pools of water on the carpet.

This was, of course, imagination, but it was a fact that the room was most dreadfully cold, although a great fire was burning and it was the cosiest room in the house.

Then, turning, she saw the figure standing by the door. This time there could be no mistake. It was a grey shadow, and yet a shadow with form and outline—the untidy grey hair, the pale face like a moonlit leaf, the long grey clothes, and something obstinate, vindictive, terribly menacing in its pose.

She moved and the figure was gone; there was nothing there and the room was warm again, quite hot, in fact. But young Mrs. Ryder, who had never feared anything in all her life, save the vanishing of her youth, was trembling so that she had to sit down, and even then her trembling did not cease. Her hand shook on the arm of her chair.

She had created this thing out of her imagination of Elinor's hatred of her and her own hatred of Elinor.

It was true that they had never met, but who knew but that the spiritualists were right, and Elinor's spirit, jealous of Herbert's love for her, had been there driving them apart, forcing her to lose her temper and then hating her for losing it? Such things might be! But she had not much time for speculation. She was preoccupied with her fear. It was a definite, positive fear, the kind of fear that one has just before one goes under an operation. Someone or something was threatening her. She clung to her chair as though to leave it were to plunge into disaster.

She longed for Herbert to come and protect her. She felt most kindly to him. She would never lose her temper with him again—and at that same moment some cold voice seemed to whisper in her ear : “You had better not. It will be for the last time.”

At length she found courage to rise, cross the room and go up to dress for dinner. In her bedroom courage came to her once more. It was certainly very cold, and the snow, as he could see when she looked between her curtains, was falling more heavily than ever, but she had a warm bath, sat in front of her fire and was sensible again.

For many months this odd sense that she was watched and accompanied by someone hostile to her had been growing. It was the stronger perhaps because of the things that Herbert told her about Elinor ; she was the kind of woman, he said, who, once she loved anyone, would never relinquish her grasp ; she was utterly faithful. He implied that her tenacious fidelity had been at times a little difficult.

“She always said,” he added once, “that she would watch over me until I rejoined her in the next world. Poor Elinor !” he sighed. “She had a fine religious faith, stronger than mine, I fear.”

It was always after one of her tantrums that young Mrs. Ryder had been most conscious of this hallucination, this dreadful discomfort of feeling that someone was near you who hated you—but it was only during the last week that she began to fancy that she actually saw anyone, and with every day her sense of this figure had grown stronger.

It was, of course, only nerves, but it was one of those nervous afflictions that became tiresome indeed if you did not rid yourself of it. Mrs. Ryder, secure now in the warmth and intimacy of her bedroom, determined that henceforth everything should be sweetness and light. No more tempers! Those were the things that did her harm.

Even though Herbert were a little trying, was not that the case with every husband in the world? And was it not Christmas time? Peace and Good Will to men! Peace and Good Will to Herbert!

They sat down opposite to one another in the pretty little dining-room hung with Chinese woodcuts, the table gleaming and the amber curtains richly dark in the firelight.

But Herbert was not himself. He was still brooding, she supposed, over their quarrel of the afternoon. Weren't men children? Incredible the children that they were!

So when the maid was out of the room she went over to him, bent down and kissed his forehead.

"Darling . . . you're still cross, I can see you are. You mustn't be. Really, you mustn't. It's Christmas time, and if I forgive you, you must forgive me."

"You forgive me?" he asked, looking at her in his most aggravating way. "What have you to forgive me for?"

Well, that was really too much. When she had taken all the steps, humbled her pride.

She went back to her seat, but for a while could not answer him because the maid was there. When they were alone again, she said, summoning all her patience:

"Bertie, dear, do you really think that there's anything to be gained by sulking like this? It isn't worthy of you. It isn't, really."

He answered her quietly:

"Sulking? No, that's not the right word. But I've got to keep quiet. If I don't I shall say something I'm sorry for." Then, after a pause, in a low voice, as though to himself: "These constant rows are awful."

Her temper was rising again, another self that had nothing to do with her real self, a stranger to her and yet a very old familiar friend.

"Don't be so self-righteous," she answered, her voice

trembling a little. "These quarrels are entirely my own fault. aren't they?"

"Elinor and I never quarrelled," he said, so softly that she scarcely heard him.

"No! Because Elinor thought you perfect. She adored you. You've often told me. I don't think you perfect. I'm not perfect either. But we've both got faults. I'm not the only one to blame."

"We'd better separate," he said suddenly, looking up. "We don't get on now. We used to. I don't know what's changed everything. But, as things are, we'd better separate."

She looked at him and knew that she loved him more than ever, but because she loved him so much she wanted to hurt him, and because he had said that he thought he could get on without her she was so angry that she forgot all caution. Her love and her anger helped one another. The more angry she became the more she loved him.

"I know why you want to separate," she said. "It's because you're in love with someone else. ('How funny,' something inside her said. 'You don't mean a word of this.') You've treated me as you have, and then you leave me."

"I'm not in love with anyone else," he answered her steadily, "and you know it. But we are so unhappy together that it's silly to go on . . . silly. The whole thing has failed."

There was so much unhappiness, so much bitterness, in his voice that she realised that at last she had truly gone too far. She had lost him. She had not meant this. She was frightened and her fear made her so angry that she went across to him.

"Very well, then. . . . I'll tell everyone . . . what you've been. How you've treated me."

"Not another scene," he answered wearily. "I can't



stand any more. Let's wait. To-morrow is Christmas Day. . . ."

He was so unhappy that her anger with herself maddened her. She couldn't bear his sad, hopeless disappointment with herself, their life together, everything.

In a fury of blind temper she struck him ; it was as though she were striking herself. He got up and without a word left the room. There was a pause, and then she heard the hall door close. He had left the house.

She stood there, slowly coming to her control again. When she lost her temper it was as though she sank under water. When it was all over she came once more to the surface of life, wondering where she'd been and what she had been doing. Now she stood there, bewildered, and then at once she was aware of two things, one that the room was bitterly cold and the other that someone was in the room with her.

This time she did not need to look around her. She did not turn at all, but only stared straight at the curtained windows, seeing them very carefully, as though she were summing them up for some future analysis, with their thick amber folds, gold rod, white lines—and beyond them the snow was falling.

She did not need to turn, but, with a shiver of terror, she was aware that that grey figure who had, all these last weeks, been approaching ever more closely, was almost at her very elbow. She heard quite clearly : "I warned you. That was the last time."

At the same moment Onslow the butler came in. Onslow was broad, fat and rubicund—a good faithful butler with a passion for church music.

He was undisturbed, his ceremonial complacency clothed him securely.

"Mr. Fairfax has gone out," she said firmly. Oh, surely he must see something, feel something.

"Yes, madam !" Then smiling rather grandly : "It's

snowing hard. Never seen it harder here. Shall I build up the fire in the drawing-room, madam?"

"No, thank you. But Mr. Fairfax's study. . . ."

"Yes, madam. I only thought that as this room was so warm you might find it chilly in the drawing-room."

This room warm, when she was shivering from head to foot; but holding herself lest he should see. . . . She longed to keep him there, to implore him to remain; but in a moment he was gone, softly closing the door behind him.

Then a mad longing for flight seized her, and she could not move. She was rooted there to the floor, and even as, wildly trying to cry, to scream, to shriek the house down, she found that only a little whisper would come, she felt the cold touch of a hand on hers.

She did not turn her head: her whole personality, all her past life, her poor little courage, her miserable fortitude were summoned to meet this sense of approaching death, which was as unmistakable as a certain smell, or the familiar ringing of a gong. She had dreamt in nightmares of approaching death, and it had always been like this, a fearful constriction of the heart, a paralysis of the limbs, a choking sense of disaster like an anæsthetic.

"You were warned," something said to her again.

She knew that if she turned she would see Elinor's face, set, white, remorseless. The woman had always hated her, been vilely jealous of her, protecting her wretched Herbert.

A certain vindictiveness seemed to release her. She found that she could move, her limbs were free.

She passed to the door, ran down the passage into the hall. Where would she be safe? She thought of the Cathedral, where to-night there was a carol service. She opened the hall door and, just as she was, meeting the thick, involving, muffling snow, she ran out.

She started across the green towards the Cathedral door.

Her thin black slippers sank in the snow. Snow was everywhere—in her hair, her eyes, her nostrils, her mouth, on her bare neck between her breasts.

“Help! Help! Help!” she wanted to cry, but the snow choked her. Lights whirled about her. The Cathedral rose like a huge black eagle and flew towards her.

She fell forward, and even as she fell, a hand, far colder than the snow, caught her neck. She lay struggling in the snow, and as she struggled there two hands of an icy fleshless chill closed about her throat.

Her last knowledge was of the hard outline of a ring pressing into her neck. Then she lay still, her face in the snow, and the flakes eagerly, savagely covered her.



MANUEL KOMROFF

*So You Won't Talk*



## SO YOU WON'T TALK

ON the same day that Handsome Dan shot the sergeant of detectives, the newspapers announced that some Russian scientists had made a wonderful discovery. It was a small news item and related to an experiment on a dog which employed great skill in surgery.

The object of the experiment was to show that the brain of the animal could be kept alive by an artificial heart constructed mechanically. At any rate, whatever the details were, it was all hailed as an important discovery in the scientific world ; but what was a discovery in the scientific world compared to Handsome Dan with his criminal record a mile long. When he shot the sergeant of detectives he went right on the front page of every paper in the country.

All this everyone already knows and everyone also knows how Dan was trapped in the apartment of one of his lady friends. These details need not be repeated here. Handsome Dan was put through the works. But, faithful to the code of his lawless world he would not speak.

Captain Quill walked up and down in front of the prisoner. The questioning had been long and strenuous. Finally he drew his chair up close to the criminal and said in quite a confidential tone, "I tell you, Danny, one thing is certain. You can't kill an officer of the law and get away with it. And one thing more is certain. The sergeant and I were very close friends. We had been to war together and we were in the trenches together. And so, Danny, handsome as you

are, you've got to come clean. We've got to know who was with you. Will you talk, or won't you talk? Who was with you?"

"I don't know."

"If you know what is good for you, you will talk."

But it was all of no avail.

Captain Quill had saved the newspapers describing the shooting of the sergeant, and it was in these papers that he noticed the account of the important scientific discovery. He spoke to the ambulance doctor about it, and the ambulance doctor did not seem to know very much; however, he knew a man who was connected with the university, who could give the captain a good deal of information. But the information that Captain Quill received he did not disclose.

Three months later a little Russian doctor arrived in town. He had a Vandyke beard, gold-rimmed spectacles, and he was dressed in a very funny collar and necktie. He wore the old-fashioned detachable cuffs that were always loose and falling down over his hands. He had evidently been brought over for something very special, and his mission was kept a great secret.

At the hotel the register was signed for him as Dr. Smith from Moscow. Of course this was an assumed name, but no doubt his name was hard to pronounce and impossible to spell. And so they let it go at that and called him Dr. Smith.

However, during the first few days the Russian doctor was not at all satisfied with the object of his mission, for the hotel clerk said that he was constantly packing his bag ready to leave, and that Captain Quill was trying his best to persuade him against it. One day they drove out in an automobile to the university and they saw Professor Fenmore of the Medical School, and then they came back, and he seemed reconciled.

At least the clerk of the hotel heard him say to Captain



Quill in very good English : "You must understand, Captain, I am a scientific man, and for science—I'll do everything. But if it is not for a scientific purpose, then—nothing. You understand. That is my life. That is what I live for!"

Captain Quill nodded and said : "Certainly, I understand. You are quite right, doctor, and you will go ahead and demonstrate your experiment to the university."

The little Russian replied : "Yes. But it will be for demonstration only."

Now the doctor set to work. Two assistants from the hospital went all over town buying all kinds of things : everything from four or five small motors, the kind that are used to run sewing machines, to small cog-wheels and fine rubber tubing. The doctor worked in the corner of one of the laboratories of the city hospital.

His main assistant, oddly enough, was not a laboratory worker at all, but a Swedish handy-man who was a combination orderly, machinist, carpenter and plumber. He had been some years in the city hospital, and whatever he did, especially his metal work, was beautifully executed and nicely finished.

Several days before the date set for the execution of Handsome Dan, Captain Quill went into the death-house and stood before the prisoner's cell.

"Danny," he said, "you can save yourself a lot of trouble, and this is the last chance I give you. You know very well that I'm not going to rest until I find that other fellow, and so you'd better talk now, for in a couple of days they're going to finish you off, and I can tell you now, Danny, you're going to have the swellest finish that ever a man had. And maybe you're not going to like it so much. And so if you want an easy exit, take my advice and talk now."

Handsome Dan smiled. He knew very well that his end was close at hand. He smiled and said : "They can't do worse than kill me."

"I tell you, Danny, you're going to talk, and that's all there is about it."

"O.K., captain. You know."

"Yes," he said angrily, "I know." And with that he marched out of the death-house.

The execution of Handsome Dan took place at six o'clock in the morning. Only a few newspaper men had been invited for this party, and the account, simple and brief, was printed in all newspapers. The affair seemed kind of hurried, and the prison doctor had his stethoscope ready and pronounced him dead in very short order. The rope was quickly cut and his body removed at once to the hospital.

In the hospital nothing could be seen. Everything was going on behind closed doors, and these doors were locked with locks almost as large as a bank safe. The Swedish handy-man and the Russian doctor were working behind these closed doors, and with them was the corpse of Handsome Dan.

They worked all that afternoon and far into the night, and at six o'clock in the morning, exactly twenty-four hours after the trap had been sprung underneath the scaffold, the Russian doctor called Captain Quill on the telephone and said everything was ready.

Quill got into his clothes and drove over to the university to get hold of Professor Fenmore, for that had been his arrangement with the Russian doctor. The work was being done for the scientific world as a demonstration, and therefore the professor from the university was to be the first. All this seemed quite unnecessary to Captain Quill, but a bargain was a bargain.

They came to the locked door of the room. The Swedish handy-man answered their knock and he spoke through the door. "The doctor wants to know who is with you."

"The Professor is with me and no one else."

Then the bolts were drawn and the two men entered the

room. There it was all before them, and the doors were quickly locked. The Russian doctor spoke to the Professor. "It's a good specimen."

On top of a cabinet, especially built for the purpose and containing machinery necessary to pump the blood and keep it at its right temperature and pressure, containing glass tubes, graduates, rubber piping, two electric motors and the maze of intricate apparatus—on top of this cabinet, surrounded by a short glass collar, embedded in two inches of paraffin, was the dismembered head of Handsome Dan. But it showed no signs of life.

Was it alive, or was it dead?

The Russian doctor washed his hands in the sink. He lathered them hard with soap and he scrubbed with a big nail-brush and he dipped his hands in the basin containing some antiseptic solution and dried them on a clean towel.

He put on his coat and he rubbed his hands together and smiled and said to the university professor, "There it is." And he spoke to him in scientific language, and he used such words as the "sterno-mastoid muscle and the trapezicus is left extra long because it shrinks so quickly, and the external jugular is connected directly with the electric heart. I removed the lymphatic glands at once to prevent their swelling and the pulse remains here, as you can notice."

He placed a finger on the jawbone of the head, just one inch in front of the angle of the jaw, and he took out his watch and counted fifteen seconds. It was beating as it should beat, and the Professor also put his finger to that special place on the bone of the jaw and felt the pulse while the Russian doctor warned him: "Gently. The wax is not hard yet. In a little while it will respond to stimulus. It will take another few hours. You are the first, Professor, in America, to witness this demonstration. And everything I have done here is clearly in detail described in my articles."

The body from which the head had been taken was on a stretcher on one side of the room, and was covered over with a black oilcloth. There were a lot of instruments and tools and all kinds of anatomical paraphernalia that the handy-man, well accustomed to hospital things, was busy cleaning up.

The two doctors spoke freely to each other, but Quill could hardly say a word. This was something that had never happened before, and scientific or not scientific, it was being done for one purpose, and he was impatient and he could not wait, and yet he recognised that it was a feat most unusual, and coughed aloud to attract the attention of the little Russian doctor. And he shook his head and said: "I congratulate you, doctor."

"In a few hours we will begin to stimulate it, and then, I believe, late this afternoon or to-night you can come back."

That is how it was. The Swedish mechanic watched the instruments that regulated the temperature, pressure and the speed of the electric pump. He did not leave that cabinet for more than one minute at a time. But the Russian doctor, after his work had been accomplished, paid very little attention, but sat in one corner of the room and made notes in a journal, and he made little drawings of anatomical details, of tied-up blood-vessels and nerves, and of the little connections that he employed to join the head to the mechanical heart.

At six o'clock that night Captain Quill arrived.

The head had now taken on a bluish colour, and the lips were swollen. The face had been washed with a small sponge and seemed very clean. The mouth was a little bit open, the eyes were slightly open, but the head did not breathe. Yet it was alive. The hair looked dull, as though it were a wig.

Quill spoke. "You look very handsome. Can you hear me, Danny?"

The doctor said: "You must stand closer and talk louder."

"Can you hear me, Danny?" shouted Quill.

The lips moved slightly, and the head spoke very faintly. "Let me die."

"Can you see what we did for you, Danny? We fixed you up very nice."

The head replied: "Let me die."

"Can you see, Danny?"

"Yes, I can see. For God's sake, let me die."

"Did you see what the rest of you looks like, you swine?" said Quill, pointing to the headless corpse covered with a black oilcloth.

"I don't care. Let me die."

"So you'd like to die, would you, Danny?"

"Yes," spoke the head.

"It cost me four thousand bucks to keep your stinking corpse alive!"

"Let me die, for God's sake."

"All right. Now, who was with you? Who was it, or by God I'll keep you here for ever. We got enough blood to keep you alive for weeks. And this is only the beginning. Who was with you?"

"For God's sake, let me die."

A few drops of dark blood, almost black, leaked out of the mouth and fell in the paraffin trough in which the head was embedded. For a moment all was silent and the head again whispered: "For God's sake, let me die."

"All right. Who was with you?"

The head hesitated. Then it spoke. "It was the wop Guido. Now, let me die, for God's sake!"

"You're sure? Say it again. Was it the wop Guido? There's no mistake about it?"

"No mistake," echoed the head. "Let me die."

"In one hour, if what you say is true, we'll turn off the pump."

"It's true," said the head.

Fifteen minutes later they picked up the wop in a pool-room. He swore he was innocent, that he never knew Handsome Dan, and they never went out together. But Quill said : "Come along with me."

He brought him to the hospital and led him into the room where the head was being kept alive by the electric heart.

"Now, you stand here," said Quill, "and listen." Then he shouted loud to the head. "All right, Danny, can you see the wop?"

"Yes, that's him," said the head. "And for God's sake let me die."

The wop Guido turned as white as a sheet. He fell to his knees and jabbered his prayers in Italian. He went almost mad and was removed from the room crying hysterically. He was uncontrollable, and they had to give him something to keep him from jumping. When they got him quiet he confessed. He told everything.

Quill went to the room and said : "All right, doctor, you can turn off the switch any time you like."

But the doctor was indignant. His wonderful specimen and all his marvellous work had not yet been seen by the scientific men, and he was waiting for them to arrive. And so, for the glory of science, the head of Handsome Dan was kept alive twenty-four hours longer.

JACK LINDSAY

*Judgment in the Underworld*





## JUDGMENT IN THE UNDERWORLD

THERE were no soldiers on guard at the Valley of the Tombs ; for the Theban authorities had not yet discovered that the tombs were being plundered again. Still, Paibes and Iseri did not approach the Valley by way of the gorge, once a river-bed, that ran down to the Nile banks and the strip of cultivated land. They walked instead along the bridle-path on the heights, choosing the path which best hid them from chance eyes. Silently they trod the dry rock under the steadily scorching rays of the sun.

For they were hunters, used to careful going. But it was gold, not hare, oryx, antelope or leopard of the desert, that they hunted on this day.

The fact that they were hunters emboldened them ; for it was natural that hunters should go wandering about far from the meadows and palm-groves of the Nile valley. Nevertheless, the two men walked carefully. They were trained to walk like that.

Iseri looked sideways at Paibes through the glare of up-beating light, hanging back a little. He loathed Paibes more than anyone else in the world. Always he had been overtopped by him, beaten as a hunter, a runner, an archer, a drinker, and now, last and worse, as a lover. He had to speak.

“It’s too early yet.”

“We can get round to the rock.”

Iseri felt reckless. “There’s no one in the Valley.”

No new tombs were being built, and no services for the

souls of the dead would be held at this time of the day in the mortuary chapels.

"One pair of eyes would be enough."

"But nobody'd be there. In such heat. Unless we're not the only ones. . . ."

Paibes spat, twisting his lean copper-hued body. "We must wait."

They found the rock and sat under its shadow.

Iseri nursed his head on his bent knee. He kept his eyes away from Paibes. He hated him so much that he feared the hate would show in his eyes.

Paibes showed no signs of discomfort. He lay on his back with his mouth open, breathing noisily. Iseri stole a glance of jealous hate at him. They had been good friends once, till Paibes had shown the full of his overbearing temper, taking arrogant possession of the younger man who admired him so frankly. Now he wouldn't allow Iseri a life of his own at all. His viciously self-assured arrogance lay over Iseri's life like a shadow, a stone.

Iseri ground his teeth, and started at the noise; but Paibes gave no sign. Iseri could endure it no longer. He could have kept on enduring insults and contempt, doing all the hardest and dirtiest work, and gaining no recompense or recognition; but he could not bear to lose Zenra, and for weeks now it had been clear that Paibes was courting her. Iseri had passed the pair in the dusk last evening, beside the sycamore tree in the village; and he had no doubt that once Paibes spoke to Zenra's father he himself would have no hope. And for years it had been a half-understood thing that Iseri was to marry Zenra.

He gripped the dagger in his belt. It was all he could do not to fling himself at Paibes where he lay on the rough, gritty ground, snoring slightly.

At last Paibes sat up. "It is time," he said, watching the

line of shadow, the tide-line of the encroaching dusk. Soon the sun would reach the rim of the western desert and sink to the underworld; the dread passage of Osiris through the twelve barriers of hidden death would go on, till finally, after the defeat of the powers of darkness, the triumphant god, once more assuming the father-garb of light, would ascend out of the east, hailed by the world's hymn.

Iseri shuddered, but grasped his dagger more resolutely.

"Chilled already?" asked Paibes, scornful and curious.

"A touch of ague in my bones," muttered Iseri.

The lips of Paibes curled. "Come along."

They turned down into the Valley, slithering along the paths of sand. Iseri was impatient, but Paibes kept coolly delaying him. "No hurry. Come round this way." Gradually they descended the terraces and humps of burning sand. The valley, into which the sun had been pouring its rays all the earlier part of the day, was unfreshened by the shadow that now filled it. It was a pit of heavy heat. Not a single tree or bush, not a single flower or grass-blade, broke the monotony of burning sand and rock. All life was blasted off the blank face of crumbling stone.

Here, in this huge crevice of fierce heat, were dug the tombs of many Pharaohs; and their chapels vainly sought to assert themselves against the tumbling masses of sand shapeless and inchoate. The air grew heavier, staler.

Iseri cleared his throat, and spat, and took a deep, unsatisfying breath.

"It's worse inside," sneered Paibes.

Iseri clenched his hand to stop it from creeping to his dagger. Worse inside was it? Worse for Paibes. Inside the tomb things would feel differently. Alone in the sweaty darkness he, Iseri, would feel power nerving his arm; he would strike. Therefore he could bear with Paibes's sneers for the moment.

On they slid. Nothing more was said. They were used to saying nothing. Often they went for hours through the sands without saying a word. Now they were at length near the bottom, slithering over a hillock of bare rock. They passed various chapels and dumps of shivered stone, making for the main valley. There were built several sepulchres and chapels, some half-falling into decay, others still showing signs of recent attention. It was for the Tomb of Sety that the hunters were looking.

They found it. The sun, unseen behind the hills, had almost set over the horizon ; but the keen eyes of the hunters could see the way. The sides of the valley loomed up portentously, rimmed aloft with a few faint star-specks.

"Come on," said Paibes harshly.

They began lifting aside some flakes of rock, then they set shoulders to a fair-sized boulder and shifted it, then they cleared away more fallen rubble. They bent down and wriggled through a narrow tunnelway ; then they were within the entrance of the Tomb.

Sety was to pay the penalty for having enlarged the entrance out of vanity, to show that a great Pharaoh had once more sat on the throne. Paibes fumbled about and found the oil-lamp which they had left on their last visit. With tinder and flint he lighted it, and at once the dark hole was alive with shadows. A wind was prowling eerily outside. It blew in through the tomb door, fluttering the flame. Iseri grasped his dagger. Osiris, give him the power to strike.

"Come on," said Paibes, without looking round.

They stole down the flight of steps and found themselves in a passage. Crouching, they went along the passage, which sloped downwards. They crouched, because they felt crushed, not because the roof was low. Paibes went ahead. Iseri tried to keep his teeth from chattering. It wasn't fear, it was the desperate effort to nerve himself for the blow. He must do it.

But he would wait till they reached the inner chamber. He wanted some of the gold as a dowry for his marriage with Zenra. Yes, Zenra would be his, and they'd live in comfort bought by a Pharaoh's death-gold. And Paibes would rot in the hot bowels of the earth.

There was another flight of steps. Iseri went down cautiously, jarring his limbs through making false calculations. The body of Paibes blocked out most of the light. His shadow swung about on the walls and on the roof like the shadows of a hundred men, ceaselessly and silently gibbering, like dumb men trying to warn of doom.

But it was Paibes himself whom they ought to warn, Paibes who stole unseeing ahead in his capable slinking way, so sure of himself. Iseri wanted to laugh, and held his hand to his throat, pressing back the laughter. What a fool the unsuspecting Paibes was, dogged by his own shadow. Why not stab him in the back and end it?

On and on they went down the passage. By the wavering light Iseri saw patches of the sculptures and paintings that covered every inch of the walls. The gods and demons of the underworld started out before his distraught eyes—scenes from the Book of That which is in the Underworld, threats and promises of eternal life, the judgment and the afterwards.

When first he had crept between these pictured walls he had dreaded the images, condemned by their calm symbolic majesty, their steadfast magic bitten flaring into stone; but now he was unafraid. He was himself an instrument of judgment, and felt encouraged by the endless pageant of forms which he understood but dimly.

No, it was not yet time to kill Paibes. The doomed man must lead the way to the altar of his destruction, the chamber of death and gold. Iseri could never bear to go down there alone.

Dreadfully the life of eternal things flickered and waved

about Iseri in the thick gusty light. Fragments of gods and their regalia, flails and pastoral crooks and crosses of life.

The air was stifling ; sweat blinded the men's eyes. They reached a room opening out into a large hall, and skirted a well-pit. The roof was supported by four great columns. Everywhere the carven forms danced in dark symbolic procession ; endlessly the after-life of the Pharaoh went on through dangers and dissolutions and judgments and justifications, into blessedness. Osiris, when was the end ? Not yet, not yet.

Paibes turned and looked at Iseri at last. Iseri shrank back. The eyes of Paibes were dilated and his jaw worked, but he said nothing ; then he smiled at Iseri, twisting his lean face. Iseri was terrified by his smile.

"You would never have found the stairway."

Iseri shook his head. He didn't dare to speak. The dagger burned against his sodden flesh as if it were red-hot. He wanted to ask for mercy. On the walls was Pharaoh judged, the shattered life of earth was reassembling itself, seeking the pattern of ultimate justice. Where was the end ?

"It was a good bit of work, that," said Paibes, still looking at Iseri with his lean, twisted grin. "The other fools missed it."

Iseri nodded his head. They went towards the stairs that had been concealed in the flooring. Iseri trod on a piece of plaster, and it crunched under his feet. He almost fell. Fear had come upon him now, but not yet fear of the Book of That which is in the Underworld. His eyes followed Paibes hungrily, despairingly. Yet he would do it when the time came. He would kill Paibes. He was sure of it now, and he was glad, glad.

"You fool," snarled Paibes. "Look where you're going."

Iseri stood swaying. There was blood in his eyes dizzying. He wanted to catch at Paibes to hold himself up. Paibes went

down the steps. Then there was another passage, and always the lines and lines of bright forms rigid in dark meaning, and the dull echoing tramp of the intruders.

Then there was another passage, and more eternal eyes. Still down the passages of hot under-earth they went, deeper into the hills. Then again the light burst upwards as if the pressure was lifted from tormented nerves ; and they were in a large columned hall from which four rooms opened.

On again, and more steps to descend, and at last the burial chamber was reached. The great sarcophagus of alabaster gleamed nobly before the tired, stinging eyes—and things of gold, furniture and cups, all that a man might need, left here in the deep, buried silence like reflections in the mirror of death, to enable living men to view their life undistorted, to value it all at long last, if they had the courage to look ; but into the terrible mirror of death none dared to look. There, encased in alabaster, lay the mummied king awaiting his release and justification, his resurrection, living his life in the mirror, dead.

Paibes had put the lamp down on a table covered with gold-foil, and was kneeling down, busily sorting things out. Now was the time. Osiris, was it the time, was it the end ?

Iseri awaited the omen which he knew would come. He wasn't afraid. He awaited. He knew it would come. Myriads of eyes were upon him. Surely it would come. The movements of Paibes creaking among the furniture grated on Iseri as if his own flesh were being torn. He stifled. His hate was so final that the gods must be on his side, as they were on the side of all things final and fated. Was it the end, the place of judgment ? Here, where the eyes judged the dead Pharaoh embalmed in sunken silence.

He clutched the dagger. He moved noiselessly towards Paibes. It would come. *It came.* Swiftly, silently, out from below an alabaster jar it came, a tall cobra balancing its flattened

head on which the markings showed like bruises from the foot that had trodden it flat. The royal cobra, the poised pillar of power.

Close against Paibes it reared, to strike. Iseri, the heft of his dagger held against his finger-tips, was ready too. He struck first. The dagger flashed behind Paibes.

Paibes turned with a curse, to see the cobra thrashing, its head pinned to the side of a chest.

"You did it," he said to Iseri. He hardly looked at the cobra. "You did it."

Iseri nodded. He did not know why he had done it. When one had hunted for years with a man, it was not easy to stand by and watch a cobra strike him. What had happened, Osiris? Was it the judgment?

"You did it," repeated Paibes. His eyes were glittering. He came nearer and took Iseri's hands. He swallowed hard, unable to speak. Iseri also said nothing, angry at what he had done. Then he looked into the face of Paibes and forgot his anger.

They had hunted together for many years. It was impossible to hate a man when one has just saved his life. Iseri's heart warmed towards Paibes. It was as in their early years of hunting together. He loved him. One cannot but love a man whose life one has saved.

"I got him in time."

"Yes."

Iseri tried to look away, but Paibes was still staring at him, trying to say something. It wasn't a rebuke or an accusation, it was something difficult, and Iseri felt uncomfortable.

"I just had to get him in time."

"I'm sorry . . ." said Paibes. Then he said what he'd been trying to say. "I'm sorry I tried to take Zenra away from you. You don't know how I've been hating you to-night. You wouldn't have done it. It serves me right. It would



have, if you'd watched me stung. I wanted to kill you to-night. I don't know. Perhaps I would have. . . ."

He had to say it all, though he choked. "I meant to . . . afterwards. I couldn't bear losing Zenra. . . . But now she doesn't seem to matter. Somehow she's quite gone. She's just nothing now. I'm glad she's yours."

"Mine?"

"Yes, she told me last night that she'd never have me. She'd kill herself first. I was in a rage. I made her confess. It's you. . . ."

His eyes stared remorsefully at Iseri, but already his face was beginning to harden. Iseri was afraid of him. He wished that he hadn't been told.

He didn't want Zenra; he wanted his old friendship with Paibes; he wanted the comradely joy of their first years.

"I don't want her," he said hoarsely. Then he looked away. "I do want her, I suppose."

Something inside was tearing at him. He wanted to say, "I'm as bad, I too wanted to kill. I was going to kill you." But he couldn't say it. It would put him too much into the power of Paibes. And yet his inability to confess was driving them apart again; because of it he couldn't accept the overtures of Paibes frankly, in the right way.

"I'd rather we were friends," he managed to say weakly.

"So we will be," said Paibes, turning away. "I didn't mean all I said. I was shaken. I only meant I was angry, but I'm not any longer. You can have Zenra."

"I don't want her."

The two men stood indecisive, afraid. Suddenly the whole weight of the hills seemed to be pressing down on them, tons and tons of stone; and there was all the long passage-way, sculptured with the indecipherable meaning of things, through which they must run the gauntlet of the multitudinous abiding eyes. Gold, why did they want gold?

But they began collecting the gold ornaments and jars, watching one another suspiciously. Neither wanted to be the one to walk ahead on the return journey ; and yet they knew that the power to do hurt had passed out of them. They were both too frightened and weary, heavy-lidded with the heat, and wanted nothing but the night air of the open.

In the open, perhaps, they would be able to draw close together again. After all ; perhaps they would hate one another worse than ever. It didn't matter as long as they got out.

PETER CHEYNEY

*Nice Work*



## NICE WORK

THE guy in the dirty grey fedora looked like he might have come out of the Bellevue Morgue—off a slab. He was big and his jaw jutted over the edge of his upturned coat collar. His eyes shifted all over as if he was waiting for somebody to pick up any time. His shoes were broken and the upper of one had gone rotten with wet. Each time he took a step it squelched.

He had four days' growth of hair on his face, and he kept in the shadow of the wall. His fingers, inside his coat-pocket, were clasped round the butt of a .38 police Positive that had once been issued to a copper who got himself cited for bravery in the line of duty the day after they buried him.

The guy hadn't got a collar or a shirt. Under the overcoat was a cotton undervest. The pant-legs showing under the overcoat were too short and the cuffs at the bottom were grimed with mud that never came from New York.

Every time he passed a store or somewhere where it was light he stuck his head down into his coat-collar. Once he saw a kid carrying some bread, and he licked his lips like a hungry dog. His nose was bothering him. He hadn't a handkerchief, and it was sore. If you've ever tried blowing your nose on newspaper you'll know what I mean.

He turned off Bowery at Kenmare. He was limping. He had a blister on his right foot where the shoe was broken.

He hastened his steps with an effort. On Mott he saw the newsboy.

The boy was standing on the edge of the sidewalk looking around. When he saw the guy in the dirty grey fedora he crossed the street and stood in the shadow. Farther down the limping guy crossed and slowed up. Then he looked around too, and worked up slowly towards the boy.

The boy made a play of selling him a news-sheet. The limping guy took it. On the front page he could see his own picture, and across the top of the sheet was a banner caption—"Fremer Breaks Jail—Kills Two Guards."

That was him!

He spoke to the boy through the side of his mouth. He licked his lips before he spoke.

"Talk quick," he said. "Where's that blonde of Franchini's?"

The boy grinned at him.

"You're in luck, mug," he said. "She's in Moksie's dive. She's hangin' around there plenty. An' is she drinkin' or is she? She's the rye queen an' toppin' off with rum. Does she get high!"

The limping guy swore quietly.

"Where's she gettin' the dough, kid?" he asked.

The newsboy spat graphically.

"She ain't," he said. Moksie's puttin' it on the cuff." He dropped his voice. "Seen that in the sheet about you," he muttered. "They're offerin' five grand for you, dead or alive. How'd you like that, pal?"

But the man was gone. The newsboy looked after him as he disappeared into the shadows and spat once more.

The guy limped towards the waterfront. He stood up

under a light in an alley and read the paper. What the kid had said was true. They were offering five grand for him dead or alive. He licked his lips and grinned—like a wolf. Then he began to walk.

It was midnight when he dragged himself down the stairs at Moksie's speak on Waterfront. The place was near empty. Moksie was leaning over the bar reading a news-sheet. The limping guy walked over slowly and looked at Moksie.

"Keep your trap shut an' like it, sucker," he said. "I gotta gun in my pocket that's liable to go shootin' itself off supposin' somebody starts to do anything that even looks screwy. Where's Franchini's girl?"

Moksie nodded his head towards the far corner. The guy looked over and saw her. There was a measure of rye at Moksie's. He picked it up and drained it. Then he limped over to the woman.

She was twenty-eight and still pretty. She was pretty high, and a half-bottle of rotgut with a fake bacardi label stood in front of her. Her eyes were heavy and her last perm had gone haywire on her. Her skin was good and her hands were trembling. She kept tapping on the floor with a four-inch French heel.

The guy slumped into a chair opposite her. He stuck the news-sheet in front of her. She looked at it and then him.

"So what?" she said. She grinned cynically. "You ain't the only guy worth five grand," she said. "Feelin' good, I suppose, because you broke out. Well . . . maybe they'll get you, sucker. They do get 'em, you know. An' what do you want, anyhow?"

He leaned towards her.

"Listen, kid," he said. "I gotta talk fast an' you gotta

listen. I been on my feet for forty-eight hours, an' unless I get under cover they'll pick me up and fry me. I'm nearly through. I'm soaked an' hungry, an' I could use liquor"—she pushed the bacardi towards him and he took a swig from the bottle—"but I gotta contact Franchini. I tell ya I gotta. Now, don't give me that stuff about not knowin' where he is. I know all about it. They're offering five grand for him too, ain't they? An' you're his girl, ain't you? Well . . . so you *gotta* know."

She jerked up her head and looked at him. A gleam of faint interest showed in her eyes.

"I contacted Marelli to-night," he went on. "He says that he can get Franchini an' me away if I can lay under cover for two days. Well, where's Franchini hidin'? Join me up with him. Another two hours an' they'll have me. Marelli will get us outa this burg in two days, an' I can fix to get him paid an' he knows it. Well . . . I'll do a trade."

"Get me along to his hideout. I got no dough—nothin' except an empty gun an' a cough. Fix me some eats an' contact Marelli. He'll get us out of here on Thursday. I'm tradin' my lay-up with Franchini for the getaway for him. Well . . . do we deal?"

She smiled. Her teeth were white and even.

"What a fine pair of killers youse two are," she said. "Takin' it on the lam both of you an' both scared stiff." She looked at the paper. "So you bust out up the river," she said. "How'dya get down here. Hi-jacked a car?"

He nodded.

"I bumped a guy in a Ford," he said. "I think I done him too. He took two slugs. They got plenty on me now. . . ."

She took another drink and passed the bottle back to him.



"D'ya meet a guy called Lloyd Schrim in the big house," she said. "A young kid—about twenty-three. He got life for a killin'."

He nodded.

"I know," he said. "He got it for rubbin' out Gerlin' at the Polecat Roadhouse. He told me he never done it. He said he took the rap for some other guy. He's not a bad kid. He's ill. He's got no dough, so they got him workin' in the jute mill. He's got T.B.—they get that way in the mill. I reckon he was played for a sucker by the guy who did the job, but he wouldn't talk. That's why they're ridin' him an' makin' it tough. I don't reckon he'll last much longer."

She looked at him.

"Why don't he try a break?" she asked. "You done it. Why can't he?"

He grinned.

"I got friends outside," he said, "friends with dough. You can make a break, but it costs dough. It cost some pals of mine seven grand to get me out."

She grinned.

"Ain't you the expensive baby," she said. "Seven grand to get you out and the cops offerin' five for you. You oughta feel swell. . . ."

He coughed. Underneath the table she heard his shoe squelch.

"Listen, kid," she said. "I'll fix it. I'll trade puttin' you up with Franchini until Marelli can get you both away. Franchini ain't got no pals like you with dough and contacts, an' he can't put his nose outside the dump. They're offerin' five grand for him too.

"Now listen. I'm goin' outside to grab a cab. Pull your hat down an' get in so the driver don't see you. Get him to drop you on Tide Alley at Parata Wharf. Down the bottom

is a bust-in warehouse. Franchini's on the top floor, but be careful. He's liable to shoot anybody he don't know."

"I'll be along in half an hour. When I come you tell me where I contact Marelli an' we'll fix the job. So long—killer!"

Franchini opened the door and looked at the limping guy. Franchini was tall and thin and dirty. He hadn't shaved for a week, and his mouth was still twitching from cocaine.

He grinned.

"Come in," he said. "You're Fremer. The dame phoned me. I reckon the idea of gettin' out of this hell-broth looks good to me. I'm for Canada."

The other grinned.

"Me, too," he said.

He closed and bolted the door behind him, and took a swig at the bottle on the table. Beside it was an automatic. There was another in Franchini's hand.

Franchini put the second gun down beside the first and sat at the table with the two guns in front of his hands, which lay on the table behind them.

"You gotta gun?" he asked.

Fremer pulled the police pistol out of his pocket and threw it on the table.

"No shells," he said laconically. "There was only two in it, an' I used 'em on the guy in the Ford I came down in."

Franchini nodded.

"O.K.," he said. "We'll wait for the dame."

They sat there waiting. Taking swigs from the bottle on the table.

It was quiet. Franchini was just taking a wallop at the bottle when they heard a car grind round the corner outside. Fremer who had his fingers under the table ledge suddenly

uptilted the table. Franchini's guns crashed to the floor. Simultaneously Fremer went across the table-top at Franchini.

The door smashed open. Half a dozen cops under a police lieutenant burst in with their guns showing.

"Stick 'em up, boys," said the lieutenant. "We got a date for you two with the hot seat. Take it easy now." He snapped the steel cuffs on Franchini and turned towards Fremer with another pair.

Fremer kept his hands up.

"O.K., lieutenant," he said. "Just feel in the lining of my coat and you'll find my badge. I'm Lemmy Caution, New York G. Division. We played it this way to get Franchini. I guessed the dame would come and spill the works to you."

The lieutenant found the badge. Caution dropped his hands. Franchini began to be sick in the corner.

"You're a mug, Franchini," said the G. man. "You oughta know that that dame of yours was always stuck on Lloyd Schrim. We reckoned that if we planted a fake story about some guy called Fremer bustin' out of the big house an' taking it on the lam to New York, and splashed his picture on the front page, she would fall for the set-up.

"How the hell do you expect a woman to be in love with a guy and have two killers bottled up in a room and not squeal when she's just been told that her boy friend was dyin' of T.B. through workin' in the jute mill; that they was ridin' him for not talkin' over a job that she knew durn well that he never pulled?

"She reckoned that the ten grand she'd get for turnin' us in would fix an escape for him. I thought she would, an' took a chance on it. Take him away, boys."

The G. man limped down the steps at Moksie's. He walked over to the bar and ordered rye. Moksie pushed the bottle over the bar.

The G. man picked it up and walked over to the corner table where the woman was slumped. Her head was between her arms. She was crying.

He sat down opposite her and put the bottle on the table. He put his hand under her chin and pushed her head up. She fell back in the chair.

"Cut it out, sister," he said. "It can be tough. I suppose they told you that there wasn't goin' to be no reward, huh? That it was a frame-up? Well, that's the way it goes. Have a drink an' stop the waterworks. It annoys the customers."

She took a drink from the bottle.

"You're funny, ain't you, copper?" she said. "It's a big laugh, ain't it? You pull a fast one on me, an' I shoot my mouth an' wise you up to where Franchini is hidin' out, an' you get him fried and I'm left on the heap."

The G. man grinned.

"Listen, sweetheart," he said. "This act wasn't so easy to put on. I ain't had any food for two days an' I walked on this broken shoe so as to give myself an' honest to goodness blister.

"Another thing, it ain't so bad as it looks. You see, I handled that Polecat Inn shootin' a long time ago. I never believed that your boy friend pulled it. As a matter of fact, Franchini did it, an' Lloyd took the rap for him an' wouldn't talk. When Franchini bumped that last mug an' scrambled, an' we couldn't find where he was, I thought this little act up an' it worked.

"Have another drink an' then let's go an' eat. There's a guy waitin' for you down at Centre Street by the name of Lloyd Schrim. I had him sprung this mornin'. He reckons he wants to marry you or something like that.

"An' there ain't no need to ask a lotta questions. He never worked in no jute mill, an' he ain't got T.B.

"Say, do you know what's good for a blister?"

LOUIS GOLDING

*Painted Love*



## PAINTED LOVE

**I**T was the evening of Mimo Giardini's farewell party to his friends in Chelsea.

Mimo Giardini, surely you recall an echo of his reputation? He was a little lad who came over from the slums of Naples and became a greengrocer's assistant.

And then, suddenly, he started painting. But with a style, an austerity, a ferocity! We have had a handful of Italian and Spanish painters over in London here who have had some similar origin, and all these young men are still painting. Admirably, too. Mimo Giardini isn't. That's the story I want to tell you.

There was a time when he seemed to have outstripped them all—in colour, in composition, in a positively demonic originality. That was the time when he was in love with Stella—that red-haired subtle English maiden, the daughter of a sea captain, the daughter of all the Norsemen who ever harried the tangled coasts of East Anglia.

She harried the tangled heart of Mimo Giardini. He went up in flame because of her; and the flame of his burning was that marvellous series of paintings of which she was the object and subject, the centre and circumference. . . .

You've never seen any of them, you object? Patience, my friend. If you think I like telling you this tale of Mimo Giardini and Stella Hanson, you're mistaken. But you must let me go my own way about it.

And the fact I want you to start off with is this—this was Mimo Giardini's and Stella Hanson's farewell party to the

artistic gentry of Chelsea and Bloomsbury. A weird, motley crowd. There were even Greeks named Smith and Scotsmen named Papaglottis. It was a community which transcended race or colour or creed, a company of the most emancipated young men and women in the most emancipated of capitals. The Neapolitan greengrocer, Mimo Giardini, the aristocratic English maiden, Stella Hanson, their supreme devouring passion for each other—they were the symbols incarnate of a new, undifferentiated world, fused in the incandescence of Art.

"You, Esperey?" cried Mimo Giardini to the latest comer on the evening of this last party. "Bravo! And isn't that Nina there? Just throw your beastly old cloak on the sofa there! Stella! Here's Nina with Esperey!"

Stella came radiantly forward, her gown of emerald silk—she looked divine in a sort of Biarritz variant of a Gainsborough picture-frock—swishing along the studio floor. "Cheerio!" she cried, holding out her arms in welcome.

Esperey bowed gallantly, his eye meanwhile marking off the sherry among its attendant bottles.

"And here's Rosa, the Lady of the Guitar!" cried Mimo, standing at the door to usher in the last guests. He turned again to Esperey. "I'm awfully pleased," he said, "you've found time to come!"

"Your pictures," said the other suavely, "not less than your wines, have brought me. And dear Stella!"

"Dear Stella!" echoed Mimo Giardini.

"After the Guitar," cried that lady, "the Lute! Sara of the Lute! How are the mountain-tops that freeze, Sara?"

"Boiling, Stella, my love!"

"A large *ballon* of that brandy, Mustapha!" ordered the hostess from the blackamoor cocktail-shaker.

"Darling," cried Sara, and threw her arms round her passionately.



Yes, all artistic London was there that night, whether it was distinguished for genius, beauty or wealth, or the skill with which it concealed its entire lack of all three. This was (as I have said) Mimo Giardini's last party—last party, at least, for two or three years; to-morrow Stella and he were setting off for Morocco. They were—positively—going to get married in Paris on the way. Such a painter as Mimo Giardini, such an inspiration as Stella, such a terrain as Morocco—would produce a set of paintings, everybody murmured, which was likely to startle the critics more shockingly than anything since Dada.

Mimo's studio was a blaze of splendour in this grey world. Distinguished by a certain revolutionary authenticism which led him to question El Greco and utter a word of praise for Bouguereau, the pageant of the portraits of Stella which hung on the walls and stood about on easels, combined an almost painful naïveté with a sort of wild and impertinent sophistication. The paintings existed in an ether at once so ardent and so pure that Rebekkah at her well (in whom we see Stella) or Leda with her swan (in whom again we see Stella) was but the same personage as St. Veronica or Brünhilde (Stella always), the various aspects of essential womanhood.

"Isn't it . . ." stammered Ronnie Herman, the illustrious connoisseur, "isn't it . . ." He screwed his eyeglass into his eye to appraise the pictures with more complete mystery. "Well, don't you think they really *are*?"

"Exactly!" said Wilkins the poet, a pale-haired, pale-eyed youth. "Exactly!" he corroborated, without a shade of cynicism, with positive and grateful enthusiasm. "And yet, clever as he is, he couldn't have brought them off if he weren't—well, just vulgarly, frightfully in love with her! Don't you think, Esperey?"

"Francesca and Paolo, Isolde and Tristan—pale shadows, pale shadows!"

"Don't be beastly!" quivered Wilkins the poet. "And don't keep all that sherry to yourself!"

"But what's that veiled picture on the easel in the corner?" people were asking. "Surely he's going to let us see it. He can't keep it veiled all night, a darned skeleton at the feast! I say, Stella, one moment!"

"Yes, yes? Wait till the guitar and lute stop calling each other names! What is it, you folk? Why do you look so mysterious?"

"It's Mimo who's the mystery-monger. What's that veiled picture about, on the easel there?"

"Oh, that? I wish I knew. I just don't. It's some little fad of his, the funny little fellow. He's been awfully solemn and serious about it for months, getting up about five o'clock to have a dab at it! Don't ask him about it. It makes him quite shirty!"

"Oh, fiddlesticks, Stella! I've never known him—oh, hello, here's himself! Now look here, Mimo, my lad, what's all this business mean? A mystery-picture, forsooth! Draw that curtain!"

Mimo Giardini smiled. There was something queer about that smile, something twisted. "Draw that curtain? Of course I will! But you must let me choose my time. I won't have it seen by artificial light!" There was no mistaking his decision. "Those others—pah! You could look at them by naphtha flares, they wouldn't suffer. This is more delicate, oh, much more delicate! I've only finished it, this very day! We'll wait for dawn. How do you like that? The very moment the sun rises, you can glut your eyes on it! You understand?"

"Hush, Mimo!" breathed Stella in his ear. "Don't shout at them! They're our guests! They look frightened!"

"My dear"—he turned round to her—"I'm so sorry.

I'm a boor! Forgive me! Hi, Sara, your lute! Rosa, the guitar! Hi! Hi! Hi! Partners!"

"Yes, partners, let's go on with it!" everybody cried with delight. The dancing seethed. Mimo and Stella flared along the studio like the northern lights.

"Stella, may I ask the pleasure of the next?" asked Esperey, with his urbane, curiously unirritating aloofness.

"Delighted, Esperey," she replied with a slight droop of her lovely head. They danced exquisitely, but like automata; they might have been Roman puppets. Very slightly, his lips only just moving, Esperey moved his head a shade nearer to Stella's. "Look at the cub. Look at him prancing there, the sweet little dago! Morocco? Bethnal Green!" Then he lifted his voice slightly so that the next couple could overhear him, if they cared to listen. "But, Stella," he avowed with debonair innocence, "you're dancing marvellously to-night! I congratulate myself!"

Again he bent close to her. "Do you understand? After the next dance but one—out in the garden! Only for half a minute!"

She drooped her eyelids in acquiescence. Wilkins claimed the next dance with her, but she refused a partner for the following dance. She confessed herself a little tired—all these preparations for Morocco. And this altogether too sweet little wedding in Paris. Quietly as a ghost she escaped from the studio. There was a sycamore over against the wall, and a dim figure waiting under it. She glided over towards it.

"Austin! Oh, my dear!" she said. His arms closed round her. His lips pressed on her own, hot as noon.

He tore his lips away. "Listen, we must get down to it. What do you think of this latest stunt? *Perfect greengrocery!* He's to end the party in true romantic style. When the holy rays of morning touch his brow—how the little fool sickens me!—he'll unveil the last picture. There's bound

to be a tremendous quacking all round him, the little wop blushing modestly at the centre. Sunrise is at five-ten this morning. We'll both slip out one minute before that time. There's a clock, isn't there, on the shelf near the Tirolese Madonna? All the rest is quite clear!"

"One minute before dawn?"

"Yes! One kiss more! Now, you go in. I'll follow."

Before three minutes had passed they were absorbed in the flare and flush of colour, the aching rhythms, the plop of corks.

"Stella," cried her lover reproachfully. "You're deserting me. Or are you afraid you'll have so much of me in Morocco you can turn me down now? I won't be turned down! Let's dance and dazzle Europe!"

"Dear lad," she said softly, "deserting you? Nina removed her arms from you just in time to escape my stiletto. Yes! Let's dazzle!"

"I'm burning to see this last picture," someone whispered. "Mimo ought to have been a producer."

"He! That's just what he is! And yet, he's still a little East End schoolboy. Whenever he sells a picture, he goes into a corner and cries, and then Stella buys him a large ice and then she kisses him and then . . . But here he is. Hello, Giardini! We're just talking about the picture, the only picture!"

"There's only an hour to go before you can see all you like of it. Don't worry about it. Let's make the best of this last hour. Like Stella and me, eh, Stella?"

"I say," said Ronnie Herman, he of the eye-glass. "Has the rotten old picture got a rotten old name? I mean . . ."

"Will someone," a voice cried irreverently, "put a sock in it!"

Ronnie blinked offendedly. He put a glass of old brandy in it, instead.

"A name?" Mimo Giardini asked, a full minute later. "Yes," he said slowly, "it has a name!"

"Oh, tell us, tell us!" a chorus rose.

"The name," said he, "is just this—'Death.'"

He whirled off with Stella on his arm. Their shoulders swayed. Their lips touched.

"Loveliest," he whispered. "That's *your* name, isn't it, Stella? Isn't it, I ask you?"

"Just that, darling. I like it. How splendidly the night's going!"

"Splendidly, Stella!"

"Here, you louts!" cried the police-womanly voice of Sara. Only one hour more. Come along, girls! Hi, there! Put some beef in it! Hoop! Hoop! Hoop!"

The maddest hour of that mad night foamed like a river in flood. The pale Wilkins lay on a vivid rug from Marrakesh, blandly asleep. Espey danced like a delicate machine, not a hair ruffled. Only in a very casual glance did he allow his eye to rest on the clock by the shelf.

"Five-ten, morning, did you say?" asked Nina.

"Yes," said Mimo Giardini, face flushed and eyes shining with oh, so dark a flame. "Twenty more minutes—twenty more priceless minutes!"

"Only ten more minutes and the bubble's bust!" said Sara.

"Only five minutes, Mimo! Get ready, boy! Stand by!"

"Three—two more minutes, Giardini! I can't bear it! Nigger, a drink!"

Mimo Giardini moved to the easel. Like a swift dream Stella was gone. With the first vaguest glimmer of dawn she was in the garden.

"Stella! Stella!" breathed the voice of Espey. "The car's waiting just near——"

"Austin, I'm afraid! I'm afraid!"

"Of that little cur? Kiss me! Afraid? Of the little dago? . . ."

"You won't move, Esperey," a voice said, rather cold, rather dead. "You, too, Stella—my sweet. Won't you both go in front of me back into the studio? I wouldn't leave you out of the little ceremony for worlds. No, no, Esperey. Not a movement! It's a nasty little revolver when it gets excited!"

The green face of Esperey, the staring eyes of the girl brought into the studio a terror and a silence.

"Where's Mimo?"

"Esperey? Stella? I say, what's wrong?"

The bloodless face of the painter appeared.

"I'll be obliged if nobody moves. Nobody, I said! We've all waited long enough for the happy ending to the party. Will you all stand in the centre of the studio? Thank you! I think I've tried to make you understand how very much I consider the veiled picture here my best work. So much so that I can't bear the rest of this stuff—all this stuff on the walls. I'm ashamed of it. It's footling. No one will interrupt me, please. I'm going to destroy all this junk!"

"Mimo, Mimo, don't be a fool. For God's sake, Mimo!"

His white face had a queer sort of moony light on it in the first streak of day. His eyes shone like hard glass. "I'll put a bullet through anyone who interferes. This is my business. And Stella's."

Slowly, like some priest celebrating some disastrous rite, he passed round the walls, slashing methodically at his pictures until all their youthful and outrageous glories were at an end. He stood beside the easel where the veiled picture reposed.

"I know," he said, "it all looks a little theatrical. You will see for yourselves! 'Death,' I called it. Here it is!"

He pulled a curtain back. A stupefaction and horror seized the revellers. An odd sort of glutinous shriek toppled from Stella's lips. Esperey tottered like a man struck by an arrow.

Painted with a cunning unworthy of no painter at all, none who had ever lived, you saw Esperey and Stella clasped in a feverish embrace. Oh, there was no doubt it was they—but what change, what devilish revelation was presented here? Her face—he had painted it so often arrogant as a tiger-lily, demure as a pansy—her face was dark as a graveyard weed. Her hair? That turbid and tawny hair was a mass of creatures, crawling and writhing . . . newts and adders. The face of Esperey was the festering-place of all sin. In each of his sunken eyes, a toad sat with puffed throat, cased in slime.

"I've known," said Mimo Giardini, "oh, my friend, my girl, I've known—all these months." An infinite melancholy and fatigue weighted his eyelids down. He opened them with a start, and shook his head sharply.

"In us the differences were to be wiped out. You remember, Stella? There was neither lord nor peasant, neither white nor dark, there was to be only love, only art. There was to be only . . . Ah well, I'm tired now. I've finished now. If you want Art, there's my only picture. You can have your bellyful!"

He moved to the door.

"Where are you going?" a girl whimpered.

"I'm going to Morocco!" he said. "Or it may be the slums of Naples, or maybe the hard hills beyond Naples and the terraced vines. Or I'm going to Hell maybe. Good-bye, ladies!" The door closed behind him.





MICHAEL FESSIER

*Over the Hill*



## OVER THE HILL

I GUESS it was imagining things that brought it about. I mean, imagining some things and not imagining others—not even daring to think about them. I'd always liked to imagine about going over the hill and finding everything changed, but I never let myself imagine the other thing at all. Just the same, I must have been thinking about it, or it wouldn't have happened. I suppose I must have been thinking about it and didn't know I was.

Oney had been getting on my nerves, and it got so that even when I was away from her she bothered me. When I was home she nagged me, and when I was away I thought about her nagging, and it was just as bad thinking about it as it was hearing it.

She cried too, and that's what I hated most. Her crying. She would cry, and I would try to get away from the sound; but I couldn't. I would go outside, and if I couldn't hear her crying, I would think about it, and it was as bad as hearing it. Nagging and crying. It was a wonder I didn't go crazy.

The only times I had peace was when I'd think things to myself. It was hard not to think of Oney, and her nagging and her crying, but sometimes I managed it. And then I was happy in a way. I liked best to think about that hill. It was about half-way between San Ramon, where I lived, and the city.

It would be nice, I would think, if some time I would drive over the hill, and on the other side everything would be

different. The service station and the nursery and the fairy farm would be gone, and something different would be there. There wouldn't be any job to go to, and there wouldn't be any home to come back to.

This thought came to me one day when I was trying to forget about Oney and her nagging and crying, and it came back to me almost every time I drove to the city. It'd be nice, I would think, if I drove over the hill and on the other side I found everything different, and there was no job to go to and no home to come back to.

I was thinking this on that day, and when I drove over the hill I found everything was different on the other side. The service station and the nursery and the dairy farm were gone, and it seemed like a park. The sun was shining, and there were a lot of coloured flowers in the grass and the water in the creek was blue.

"There are probably a lot of children," I thought.

And then I said : "My God ! This is the other side of the hill, and it is different."

And then it seemed quite natural, and I wasn't amazed or frightened. I just took it for granted. I don't remember getting out of the car, but I realised that I was walking through the grass and smelling the flowers. The flowers were beautiful and their odour was sweet ; but what I liked best was the smell of the grass and the earth. The earth smelled as if there had just been a rain.

I wasn't surprised at all when I saw the children. It was as if the flowers had come to life. They wore bright clothes, and they moved about as if the wind were playing with them. They called out to me and smiled at me, and I felt that they knew me and weren't a bit surprised to see me walking among them.

I walked as if I knew where I was going and what I would find. I took a path that branched off from the one I was

following, and I came to a house that was white and had flowers growing around the base. The stream flowed through the yard, and the water was blue except where the sun shone on it and made it gold.

A woman came out and smiled at me, and I smiled at her and said "Hello." She was beautiful, and I knew how her voice would sound even before she spoke. It was soft and kind and happy. She sat on a white bench that had vines around the legs and backs, and she motioned for me to sit beside her. I sat down and took off my hat and threw it on the grass, and I felt the breeze blowing through my hair.

"I've been a long way off, and I've come a long way back," I said.

I didn't know why I said it, but she understood. She nodded and smiled.

"You are beautiful," I said. "And kind."

"Everything is beautiful," she said. "You are beautiful." I thought a while.

"I guess I am," I said, "in a way. But I didn't know it."

"You forgot," she said.

"Yes," I said, "I forgot."

"It has been a long time," she said.

"Yes," I said, "it has been a long time."

"But it isn't any more," she said.

"No, it isn't," I said.

She got up and went into the house. She walked gracefully, and, although there were many flowers on the grass, she didn't step on any of them. She came out, and she had a yellow pitcher filled with milk. The milk was foamy, and I could tell it was cool before I tasted it. She had bread, too. It was as white as the milk, and its crust was as golden as the pitcher.

"It's funny how I remembered something I didn't know," I said. "I knew you would do that."

She smiled and sat down beside me, and I ate the bread and drank the milk.

"I am tired," I said. "And I want to sleep."

She sat on the grass and took my head on her lap, and her fingers were soft and cool as she moved them over my face. The shrub that gave us shade had flowers on it.

When I woke up there were two children playing on the grass. I called to them and they came over to me. They smiled and sat down beside me.

"I'm remembering again," I said. "I'm remembering something I didn't know. If I were to ask them who they are they would tell me, but I don't have to ask because I remember."

The woman went into the house and we followed her. The two children and I followed. The house was cool and clean and cheerful, and it seemed to me that somehow the sunshine and green grass and flowers and fresh air had been transformed slightly and confined within four walls and under a roof. I sat down by a window, and although I had not felt tired I felt rested.

The woman sat on the floor at my feet and talked to me. Her voice was cool and pleasant and happy and we talked for a long time. I don't know what we talked about. It didn't matter. Her voice told me things without words. The sun went down and the night came quickly, and it didn't matter that I couldn't see the grass or the flowers or the stream, because I could smell them and feel them in the wind.

The woman sat at a piano and she played tunes that I had never heard, but that I knew. It was music that rippled and flowed and then laughed and bubbled. I watched her hands as they moved over the black and white glistening keys.

"It wouldn't matter if there were no piano and no music," I thought, "just watching her hands would be enough."

It was night and then it was day again, and I woke up feeling that it didn't matter that the night had gone because

the day would be wonderful too, and then night would come again, and the woman and the children and I were together. We walked and we talked and we rested. And the walking was fun and the resting was fun and the talking was fun.

But I don't know what we talked about or even what I thought. I don't believe I thought. The woman was beautiful and kind and happy. And the children were happy. And I was happy. But I didn't think. "She is beautiful and kind and happy, and the children are happy, and I am happy." That was what should have been. It was what always should have been and always should be. Over the hill and on the other side things were as they should have been. Things were as they always should be.

It is hard for me to describe the change. I guess it wasn't a change at all. The thing was, and then it wasn't. And because it wasn't it never had been. You can't change from something that never was to something that is. I put my foot on the brake and the exhaust from the motor made a rumbling sound as I took my foot off the accelerator. I saw the service station and the nursery and the dairy farm, and the sun came through the mist and the grass was green, but there were no flowers.

"I had a dream last night," I thought, "and I remembered it a while back, and now it is gone."

I was over the hill and on the other side and I was driving my car to work and thinking about Oney and her nagging and crying. I was thinking about how the crying was even worse than the nagging, and how eventually the nagging would drive me crazy.

"It would be nice to think about the dream," I thought, "but I can't remember it."

And then I was at the office and I was wondering why the others looked startled when they saw me. I wondered why some of them looked startled and frightened. It was time for

the conference to start, and I went into the boss's office. And he look startled, too.

"My God!" he said, "What are you doing here?"

"Why, I came in for the Monday conference," I said.

He said something to his secretary, and she left the office.

"It isn't Monday," he said; "it's Wednesday. And even if it were Monday, what made you come to the office? Don't you know they're looking for you?"

"Two days," I thought, "two days. This morning I got up, and it was Monday, but over the hill and on the other side it became Wednesday."

And then I remembered and I thought: "It wasn't a dream. This is Wednesday. It isn't Monday at all. It's Wednesday."

The boss didn't say anything, and I realised he was behaving in a peculiar manner, but I didn't think about it much because I was too busy thinking about the other things. I was too busy thinking about how it was Monday when I drove over the hill and down the other side, and now it was Wednesday.

The boss's secretary came in, and with her was a policeman. She pointed to me and then ran across the room. She was frightened.

The policeman grabbed me by the arm and hurled me against the wall, and he put his hand on his gun.

"You better come quietly," he said.

"Why should I go with you at all?" I asked.

"Don't play innocent," said the policeman.

"I'm not playing anything," I said. "I just don't know what you're talking about."

The policeman laughed, and then he grew angry and it seemed he was about to hit me.

"I'm talking about your wife," he said, "and you know damned well I am."



"My wife?" I said. "My wife? Why?"

"Because you killed her Monday," he said, "and you know that damned well, too."

"This isn't Monday," I thought, "it's Wednesday. It isn't Monday, it's Wednesday."

And it seemed I should laugh at the policeman or become angry or shout denials, but I didn't. I felt I had to say something just to break up the silence in the room.

"I didn't kill my wife Monday," I said.

"Maybe it was Sunday night, then," said the policeman. "My Lord, you're dumb. Didn't even change clothes."

He turned to the boss.

"He didn't even change his clothes," he said.

"Why should I have changed clothes?" I asked.

The policeman pointed at the sleeve of my grey suit.

"Why shouldn't you have changed?" he said. "That's why. What's that on your sleeve?"

I looked at it, and remembering and thinking ceased to be.

"It's a bloodstain," I said.



HERMAN B. DEUTSCH

*Doo-Doom got to Hang*



## DOO-DOOM GOT TO HANG

**D**OO-DOOM got to hang !  
Up and down on Rampa't Street all de mens and all de ladies sayin' it.

Doo-Doom got to hang !

Dryades Street, Lib'ty Street, Gravier Street, P'dido Street.

Doo-Doom got to hang !

Dey sayin' it on a Friday night, yessuh, Friday de thutteenth day of de month, because dat's when de jurymens done say so. Say so when de trial's finish while de sun gwine down. Trial in de big co't room on top de big co't house. C'ot room wid a plum-colour carpet on de flo'. Silver-hair jedge wid a crinkle silk robe what's black, black, black. Black as de black cats on Friday the thutteenth day of the month.

Bring in Doo-Doom ! Bring in Doo-Doom on a Wednesday mawnin so de jurymens can see him in de white folks' co't, bring in Doo-Doom wid plenty cap'ns fum de parish jail-house so's he don't run 'way, 'cause he kill de lady and he kill de li'l boy. He kill 'em wid a ax las' April in de grocery sto', way down on de Gentilly Road.

Doo-Doom done confess to de law an' to De Strick Attorney Stanley, but bring in Doo-Doom anyway. Got to have a trial in de white folks' co't and see does de jurymens say guilty widout ayre capital punishment, or does dey say he got to hang when Friday de thutteenth day of de month come round and disheer trial through, bless Gawd and praise He Name !

Show Doo-Doom to de jurymens. One got a bald head and one got a musstash and four got glasses out the all twelve, so dey kin look good at Doo-Doom and see does he got to hang.

Doo-Doom got no lawyer mens because he got no money, nossuh, all he got out de grocery sto' where he kill de lady and kill de li'l boy was fi' dollars and it long gone, long spent, long throwed away on a yellow gal. Can't have no white folks' trial widout he got a lawyer, so de silver-hair jedge say Mist' Frank Rhodes and Mist' Eddie Mahoney got to be Doo-Doom's lawyers and ask the jurymens please suh not to say Doo-Doom got to hang.

Lots uh cullud folks yuh in de co't. Some is fo' a witness and some is fo' a friend, and some is only come to see does Doo-Doom got to hang.

Call de witnesses fo' De Strick Attorney Stanley, yonnuh he by de li'l table wid de law books. Call de witnesses good and loud, holluh out dey name in de hallways. Call de witnesses to tell de jurymens how Doo-Doom go to de grocery sto' on de Gentilly Road early in de mawnin and kill de lady and kill de chile, sho he did, he say so he own self when he confess to de law.

Call de witnesses loud and high, yes call dem, my brudder, call de ones what fin' de bodies a-layin' on de grocery flo.' Call de police cap'ns, call de police mens, call Joe Davis de black men wid de gol' teeth, what's de husband of Cinderella Youngblood, call Cinderella Youngblood, too.

Joe Davis say :

"How I know da's my ax, Lawyer? I know da's my ax de same way you knows I's de same nigger what's sittin' yuh does you see me on de street to-morrow mawnin'. I knows dat ax, yessuh, I knows it jes' as certain as I see you's a white man."

Cinderella Youngblood say :

"I cross de road to get back dat ax fum de ya'd whereat Junius live wid dat woman. Nossuh, I never bother wid dat

woman because she jus' ain't my class, I works for my livin', me."

Da's what Cinderella Youngblood tell de lawyer, and she say to De Strick Attorney Stanley :

' I got to borrow a ax all de time now to cut wood to put under my white folks clo'es, because you keep my ax up yuh in de co't house fo' a witness. Junius Robaire he walk off dat day wid de ax what I give him when he come to borrow it."

Li'l Willy Arthur Mack, li'l black boy what only nine year old, dey call him fo' a witness. Call Willy Arthur Mack, call him good and loud in de co't room, in de hallway, on de stair, call him to de witness stand, yessuh. He splain to de silver-hair jedge in a black-black crinkle silk robe, how he only nine year old but he can be a witness and talk to de jurymens because he know if he don't tell de troof Gawd'll kill him when he make de oath.

He run he li'l pink tongue on he lips when he talk to de jedge, on account he on'y li'l bittie black boy, and he scaid, tellin' how Mist' Doo-Doom sent him on de bank and on de mawket to get paper money fo' all de copper centses and de silver dimes and de two-bitses he took out de sto' on de Gentilly Road where he kill de people.

Call De Strick Attorney Stanley fo' a witness, yessuh, call De Strick Attorney he own self, call him loud and clear, to tell de jurymens how Doo-Doom confess to de law. He say dey treat Doo-Doom pow'ful kind. He say dey tell de cap'n in de firs' precinct to give Doo-Doom anything he want. Ask Doo-Doom what he want fo' he breakfus', and Doo-Doom says he want po'k chops and chocklit ice cream, yessuh he did so, and dey brung it to him fo' he breakfus' in de firs' precinct station.

Mist' Mahoney say dey treatin' Doo-Doom too kin'-hearted account dey want him to confess, and de confess is

agin de law when you do like that. Sey dey brung him po'k chops and chocklit ice-cream fo' he breakfus' so's he'll make de confess. He say it like dis : "Po'k chops !" De people in de co't room start to laugh but de silver-hair jedge make 'em be quiet, and he tell Mist' Mahoney nemmine, de confess is all right, and so De Strick Attorney Stanley read de confess to de twelve jurymens which one got a bald haid and one got a musstash and fo' got glasses to see Doo-Doom good, yessuh.

Call Auntie Rose Sylvester, she a old black lady what's Doo-Doom's auntie, and looka yuh ! She likewise de mammy what nurse De Strick Attorney Stanley when he a li'l baby. Call Auntie Rose Sylvester and ask her what she tell Doo-Doom to make him confess to de law.

Auntie Rose Sylvester say :

"I ain't tell Doo-Doom nuttin' on'y : 'Son, trus' Gawd an' tell de troof !' Da's all I tell him, an' de tears bus' out he eyes an' stream down he cheek, an' he say : 'Auntie, I is tellin' de troof, it wa'nt me kill de people, no'm, it was disheer Blue Cornish.' Da's what he say, an' de tears a-streamin' down he cheek, but all I ever did say to him was : 'Son, trus' Gawd an' tell de troof !' "

So den dey had dey argyument. All de lawyer mens holluh loud and strong, jes like dey was a callin' fo' a witness to come to de co't room wid a plum-colour carpet on de flo'. But they wa'n't callin' fo' no witness, nossuh, dey was talkin' 'bout Doo-Doom, and he a-settin' in de co't fo' all de jurymens to see him.

De young De Strick Attorney, what he name Mist' Herz, he de first one to do de talkin' and he tell about de li'l boy what was struck down in de Spring of de year. He say he struck down lik it was wid de lightnin's of de Lawd Gawd, and de lady kin-folks of de dead boy start to cry and take on, and dey mens dey put de arms around dem to bring dem comfort in de co't room.



Grey-hair lawyer Mist' Frank Rhodes talk about de po'k chops and de chocklit ice-cream what dey buyin' fo' Doo-Doom breakfus' and he say it pussuasion, yessuh, he say dat, he say dey pussuadin' dis po' boy which he name ought to be Dum-Dum not Doo-Doom, account he haven't got good knowledge.

Mist' Mahoney say plenty, too, say dey harassin' dis po' unfawchnit niggro boy day an' night to make him confess in de Spring of de year. Mist' Eddie Mahoney say to de twelve jurymens how some day dey gwine stand befo' a pow'ful jedge dey ownself and got to answer, and den dey'll know how it feel to be judged. And he say Doo-Doom smoke plenty muggles cig'rettes, and di'n know what he do in de Spring of de year, and dey mustn't hang a po' unfawchnit niggro boy and he so full of muggles at de time he di'n know what he do.

And den it was De Strick Attorney Stanley turn to talk to de jurymens and he sholy done so. He say dey got to make de city safe, make it safe on Rampa't Street and P'dido Street and by de river and by de lake, make it safe on de Gentilly Road in de Spring of de year, yessuh. He say Doo-Doom crouchin' outside de grocery sto' in de Spring of de year, watchin' de people till he sho' coas' is clear, crouchin' and watchin' like a jungle beas', da's what he say to de jurymens.

He say everybody got de right to live, and Doo-Doom took away dat right fum de li'l boy, so de li'l boy couldn't grow up and couldn' have no sweetheart, and couldn't marry and have no children of he ownself. He say it all right to talk about pity fo' unfawchnit Doo-Doom, but what about pity fo' de li'l boy Doo-Doom kill, and when he talk like dat de lady kin-folks of de li'l boy took to weepin' and moanin' once mo'.

And den de silver-hair jedge wid de black-black crinkle silk robe, what he name is Jedge Echezabel, he talk to de jurymens while de sun gwine down on Friday de thutteenth day of

de month, while de sun gwine down fas'. He read dem all about de law, and Doo-Doom listen, too.

De jurymens walks out de co't room, each one carryin' he hat in he right hand, walk on de plum-colour carpet single file, but dey don't go home, not yet. Dey gwine home to dey famblies on Friday de thutteenth day of de month. When de sun was jes' on de set dey comes back in de co't, and de big juryman he says:

"Guilty."

And den he wait a while, and say :

"As."

And den he wait a pow'ful long time and say :

"Charged."

Yessuh, he say like dis : "Guilty . . . as . . . charged !"

Dat mean :

"Doo-Doom got to hang !"

Up and down on Rampa't Street, all de mens and all de ladies sayin' it. Dryades Street, Lib'ty Street, Gravier Street, P'dido Street, Friday de thutteenth day of the month.

Doo-Doom got to hang.

On'y he name ain't Doo-Doom, nossuh, he name Junius Robaire, and when he's li'l brown baby nussin' at he mammy breas', she don't call him Junius, neither Robaire, she call him Doo-Doom 'cause she fondlin' him. It de love-name what he mammy give him, and now everybody sayin' it.

De jurymens say it, de silver-hair jedge say it, up and down on Rampa't Street all de mens and ladies sayin' it on Friday the thutteenth day of the month.

Doo-Doom got to hang ! Doo-Doom got to hang !

POST WHEELER

*The Diviner and the Poor Woman*



## THE DIVINER AND THE POOR WOMAN

WHEN Seimei, the famous diviner, was but a stripling (though even then his skill in divination passed that of all men) it befell that he went upon a journey to a place ten sun-rounds' distance from his home to visit a certain sage with whom he had been in correspondence touching the significance of certain aspects of the planets, and on the eighth day, arriving after dark-down at a straggling village, he looked about him for an inn in which to pass the night.

The place, however, was a beggarly hamlet, a huddle of dilapidated cottages off the main road, and not to speak of a hostelry, boasted not even a tea-house for transient entertainment; so he had perforce to ask shelter where he might, and seeing by the way a cottage with a friendly candle-light yellowing its *shorji*, he knocked upon its entrance.

A woman past middle-life, clad in a patched kimono, opened to him, and said she before he could syllable his need, "Deign to come in, for you are expected." Wondering, he entered the house, which was small and mean, with mats torn to tatters though clean enough, and with an alcove bare as his shin of *kakemôno* or ornament, when said she: "All has been made ready for your coming that my disgraceful poverty permits. I pray you in your generosity to be augustly pleased to overlook its shortcomings."

"O mirror of hospitality!" said he, "let me not take profit of your error. I am a stranger in this village who am

seeking a place whereon to lay my head. Doubtless you are expecting someone for whom you take me?"

But she replied: "Nay, I look for no other, and you are ten thousand times welcome."

So, supposing her reply sprang from excess of courtesy, he doffed his outer robe and sat down, while she busied herself about his comfort. Presently said she: "The honourable bath is prepared if you will deign to take it." Said he: "Gladly."

Then she conducted him to a bath in which the charcoal had long been lighted and assisted him to disrobe, and after he had relaxed his creaking sinews with the steaming water, she made him lie down while she kneaded the weariness from his back and thighs, after which (offering humble apology for her lack of servants) she set before him a table on which the bowls and chop-sticks had been ready laid, and brought out its counterpart for herself, and served him a meal of rice and mountain potatoes, which had been kept hot over the fire-bowl, she eating with him.

Now it puzzled him that all these preparations should have been made when he himself had not known what house in the place he should enter till the moment his hand knocked upon the door; so as they ate, he asked: "How comes it that you said I was expected here to-night? For none in this neighbourhood was aware of my coming nor did I myself know that my inconsequential shadow should linger in this enlightened village."

But at that she laughed and answered: "Do not jest with this benighted one, O Repository of Secrets and Fulfiller of Desires!" and more on that topic she would not say. So they conversed for awhile (he finding her a woman of culture and refinement, though so poor) till desire for slumber came to him, when she spread a pair of cheap cotton quilts for him, and wishing him easy sleep, retired to another room.

In the morning he woke betimes and dressed himself, to find her preparing the rice for breakfast, and this meal they ate together also, after which he girded himself to take up his journey. Then said he to the woman: "Accept my tawdry thanks for the boundless bounty of your entertainment and, not in recompense, but as earnest of my gratitude, deign to receive this niggardly gift."

And so saying, he laid in her hand a gold-piece which would have kept rice in her pot for a round year. But she put it from her, replying: "Shame me not by counting your so-long-looked-forward-to visit a thing to weigh against filthy metal. What need shall I have presently to take tea-money?" He answered: "If you have knowledge of good fortune to come, accept my eight-thousand felicitations."

And prostrating himself in grateful farewell to her, he rose and went out of the door. But when she saw that he was indeed departing, she ran after him and clutched his sleeve at the gate, exclaiming: "What! Would you in very truth leave without paying my due?"

Exclaimed he: "Do you count the gold-piece I offered you insufficient return for my food and shelter? What would you, then?" Said she: "Give me the thousand gold *kōban* I was to have of you." "A thousand gold *kōban*!" he exclaimed. "Are you mad?"

But she said: "Do not make a sport of me. The gold is mine, not yours. Except you give it me, I will cry you a robber to all the village and afterwards I will kill myself."

When he heard her speak thus, Seimei was nonplussed, thinking her lunatic, and would have shaken her off, but she began to wail and shriek aloud, still clinging to him, till the folk of the street came from their houses and surrounded them.

Said he to them: "Good folk, I pray you relieve me of this embarrassment and let me go my way." They replied:

"What have you done to her, that she treats you in such fashion?"

Asked he : "Is she not mad?"

They answered : "No, she is as sane as we are and you shall do her no wrong."

Said Seimei : "I lodged at her dwelling last night—since you have in your village no caravanserai—and she entertained me with all courtesy. When just now I took leave of her, feeling pity for the seeming meagreness of her resources, I offered her a gold-piece, which she refused, demanding of me a thousand gold *kóban*."

Then the folk asked her : "Does the stranger tell the truth?"

She replied : "Aye. But I did not ask the gold in payment of his entertainment. It is my own, having been left in this man's charge, and he shall give it to me."

Said Seimei : "Surely, she is honourably demented. I dwell in the next province, and have never set sandal in this esteemed hamlet in all my mortal days."

Now the head-man of the village lived near by, and they ran and brought him, and when he was come they acquainted him with the matter. Asked he of Seimei : "Is this woman's claim upon you a just one?"

Seimei answered, with indignation : "How can it be? I never saw or heard of her in my life."

Said the head-man then : "Be not wroth at my question, which considered only the fact." And he said to the woman : "Why do you say this man has such a sum of yours?"

She replied : "As you well know, my father was accounted a rich man in this village, and while he lived, I, his only daughter, was acquainted with all luxuries. Ten years ago he changed his world, since which time I have dwelt in leanness and poverty. The reason for this is that shortly before he died, desirous of providing for my age, he put into this man's charge the bulk of his fortune, a thousand



gold *koban*, to hold in trust for me against this particular time, when I was to receive it at his hands."

Exclaimed Seimei, at this: "I call the Deities to witness that I know not even her name, nor who was her father, and no man ever left a thousand gold *koban* in my charge, for her or for any other person."

The head-man asked her: "Did you yourself witness this transaction?"

She replied: "No."

"Did you ever see this stranger in company with your father?"

"No."

"How then did you learn of it?"

Said she: My father acquainted me with it with his last breath."

Then the head-man asked Seimei: "What is your honourable name?"

Seimei replied: "Let her tell you."

But the woman said: "Nay, I do not know his name, and I never did."

Asked the head-man: "How, then, do you recognise him as the man to whom your father entrusted the gold?"

She answered: "As all know, my father was deeply learned in the science of divination, and with his last strength he called for his rods and cast them on the mats beside his quilts. When he had thus made divinement, he called me to him and said he: 'Oh, my daughter, my spirit has long been poisoned with fear of your future, for I would have your later life rendered secure against wry-fortune. With this thought I have put by a thousand gold *koban* in safety, which will be given you by a youth fair and of upright frame, with a mole upon his left thigh, who will come to this house and ask of you a night's shelter in the tenth year from this, in the seventh month, on the fourth day, at dark-down.'

"He bade me treasure his words in my heart, and having thus spoken, he released his spirit. So I buried him and mourned him and lived in all comfort for a year or two, but after that evil-fortune overtook me and a thief stole a moiety of the gold that he had left me, so that I lived more and more narrowly. This year I have been forced to gain my daily rice by selling my household possessions, till now I have little save the thatch over me and the robe I wear. But I have not failed to keep tally of the months till the time of which my father told me should be wound up.

"Now yesterday was the fourth day of the seventh month of the tenth year since he changed his world, and in the afternoon I cleaned the house and prepared such food as I had, and made ready the bath, and at dark-down there came this youth who knocked upon my door asking a night's lodging. I received him in all joy, and perceiving upon his thigh, when he was in the bath, the mole of which my father had told me, I knew that he was the one who should give me the thousand *koban*. So I waited, thinking he would certainly do so, till seeing that he was actually departing without a word of the gold which is mine, I ran after him and seized him, demanding that he give me my due. This is so."

Said Seimei to her: "You say your father was a diviner. Have you still the rods he used?"

She replied: "Yes."

Said he: "Fetch them to me here."

She went and brought them to him, and he bade the folk withdraw a little space on all sides, and cast them on the ground. Eight times he cast them, and when his divinement was finished, he said to the woman and the head-man: "Come you two with me," and led them into the house. There he asked the woman: "In what chamber did your father die?"

She replied: "In the room where we stand."

At that he went to the pillar that supported the alcove

and smote it sharply with his knuckles, at which it gave forth a sound like an empty gourd, and at that he set his shoulder against it and gave it his weight, when it moved from its place (since it had been cunningly sawn through at top and bottom) and fell lengthwise, and the middle of it had been hollowed out, and there poured forth from the hollow upon the floor a deluge of gold *kōban*.

Said Seimei to the woman : "There is your coin, which your father placed here against the future. By his skill (which, indeed, was admirable) he divined that at this time a brother diviner should be your guest and should discover the hidden hoard to you."

Then the woman fell on her face before him and wept upon his sandal-thongs, crying : "Oh Great Scholar ! I break my bones upon you ! How shall I atone for my unmannerly violence and the wrong with which I have wronged your innocence ?"

But he lifted her and consoled her, and the head-man ran out and told the news to all the folk, and they came in to rejoice with her. And they sent the young Seimei on his way with praise and blessings, and his name has never been forgot in that village.



WALTER R. BROOKS

*Like a Diamond in the Sky*



## LIKE A DIAMOND IN THE SKY

THERE was a man in Rochester named Mr. Theodore F. Simpson, who collected match packs. He had nearly two thousand different ones. And he had a wife named Mrs. Simpson who thought it was all nonsense and said so and perhaps it was. But whatever Mr. Simpson did she would have said that.

Well one day Mr. Simpson went to New York on business and Mrs. Simpson went along to see that he didn't overdo.

For nearly every time he went along he overdid and indeed once he had had to be carried off the train in the Rochester station on his return. They stayed four days and the last night in the hotel Mr. Simpson was pretty tired and he was mad as anything when somebody in the next room began singing and carrying on.

After a while he got up and put on his dressing-gown and slippers and Mrs. Simpson said Oh what is the matter now? and Mr. Simpson said I am going to put a stop to this and Mrs. Simpson said Oh call the office and complain and Mr. Simpson said Office nothing I will settle this myself. And he went out in the hall and rapped on the door of the next room.

It was a funny kind of singing more like a chant, but it stopped and a little old man in a beard and a long robe came to the door and said Yes? Please quiet down said Mr. Simpson I have spent the entire evening at an O'Neill play and I want to get some sleep if I can. Oh forgive me said the old man I was just trying out a new spell. A spell? said Mr. Simpson. Yes said the old man I am a wizard. Ha ha said Mr. Simpson,

that's a good one ! What said the old man you don't believe me ? Well step in a moment.

So Mr. Simpson stepped in chuckling and the wizard produced a little wand and made a few trial passes and then he said Now I shall enchant you. Go ahead said Mr. Simpson still laughing. The wizard looked at him hard and said You don't believe me ? and Mr. Simpson said Hell no and the wizard said O.K. it's your own fault and touched him with the wand. And then Mr. Simpson stopped laughing.

It began in his feet. It was a queer feeling as if the floor was moving down away from him and then as he grabbed at the door jamb to steady himself he began to rise in the air and he went right up till his back bumped gently against the ceiling. Hey he said stop this let me down. But the wizard only grinned and reached up and pushed his feet so that he began to whirl. And he whirled and bounced around from one corner of the ceiling to another like a toy balloon and not at all he thought the sort of thing for a respected member of the Rochester Chamber of Commerce.

And it made him seasick. He begged to be let down but the wizard paid no attention and was just about to open the window and let Mr. Simpson sail out into the soft blue night above Manhattan and goodness knows if he would ever have come down again when Mrs. Simpson came in the room.

Is my husband here ? said Mrs. Simpson and then she saw him and said Ted come down this minute you are making a spectacle of yourself again. Mr. Simpson hooked a toe under a wall fixture and pushed himself over to the corner farthest from the window and said I can't and I'm getting sick with all this whirling Doris make him let me down. And Mrs. Simpson said to the wizard Come come stop this nonsense. And she looked so unpleasant that the wizard looked a little frightened and said I'm sorry but there is nothing I can do.



You aren't much of a wizard said Mr. Simpson if you can't undo your own spells and how am I to go back to Rochester like this ?

The wizard blushed slightly and said To tell you the truth it is a new spell that I have only just perfected and I tried it on you more out of curiosity to see if it would work than anything else. And he looked at them with a helpless and embarrassed smile. See here said Mrs. Simpson You let him down or I'll call the police. Really stammered the wizard there is nothing I can do and I will go now if you'll excuse me. And he vanished.

Well this is a pretty howdido said Mr. Simpson. You might at least have got his name and address. If you'd stayed where you belonged you wouldn't have got into this mess said Mrs. Simpson but come along we can at least get back in our room. And she caught his hand and pulled him down and towed him back through the hall. And then she got him into bed and tied him down with the tie-backs from the windows. And they wrangled a while and then went to sleep.

In the morning Mrs. Simpson got a plumber to put some lead soles on Mr. Simpson's shoes and he put them on and dressed and after he tried them around the room they went out for a walk to get used to them. He swayed and when people bumped into him he bounced but he couldn't fall over for he was like those non--tip-overable ash-trays that have the weight in the feet. They couldn't find the wizard. He had registered as John Smith of London and there weren't any wizards listed in the telephone Red Book and even the information bureau at the Public Library couldn't help them. So they went back to Rochester.

Well it was pretty hard for Mr. Simpson at first being lighter than air. The lead soles weren't practical when he had to meet people because though his feet were solid the rest of him wobbled like jelly and when anyone shook hands with him

he just flopped. So Mrs. Simpson got a lot of little lead sinkers and sewed them into his suits. After that people didn't notice it so much at least they didn't yell after him in the street. And she made necklace and anklets and bracelets of sinkers to keep him down in bed so when he was ready for the night or a bath he looked like a Zulu medicine man.

Mrs. Simpson was pretty unpleasant about the whole thing. She felt that it was all his fault but she couldn't find any really good reasons to back up her belief and that made her mad so she went around with a perpetual expression of blame on her face. Poor Mr. Simpson his home life was certainly no bank of violets.

The thing Mrs. Simpson objected to most was the habit of Mr. Simpson got into after the first few weeks of sleeping in the air. For he didn't sleep well in bed. The sinkers were uncomfortable, so one night he got a cord and tied one end to the bed and the other round his waist and then he took off the sinkers and floated up to the end of his tether and slept there very comfortably. But in the middle of the night Mrs. Simpson woke up and saw him floating there four feet above her head and went into roaring hysterics. Mr. Simpson came down the cord hand over hand and tried to comfort her but it was no good, and she refused to sleep in the same room any more.

Well, it was after that that Mr. Simpson began experimenting. With all his clothes on and carrying a brief-case containing a flashlight a flask of whisky and some sandwiches and with a coil of light strong cord with a grappling iron at one end in his hand he was just heavy enough to stay on the ground if there was no wind. But he was so light that he could jump to enormous heights and of course he could go up the side of a building like a fly. So he would go to his room every night as if he was going to bed and lock the door and take his brief-case and jump out the window and in that way

he climbed all over Rochester and had lots of fun, and it was instructive as well as entertaining.

The hardest thing was to learn to jump accurately. Until he worked out the right angle and the right force he never knew where he was coming down, and he got tangled in trees and fences and once he came down in the middle of a Salvation Army meeting on a street corner. He got away by just jumping again and he sailed slowly over the roofs on the other side of the street but it caused quite a flurry in religious circles, for even though he had on a tweed suit and carried a brief-case, there were plenty of witnesses to swear that the meeting had been visited by an angel, and six Rochester drunkards reformed on the spot. But, after a while he got good and could jump eighty or a hundred yards and land within a foot or two of where he aimed. Only not on windy nights.

Well Mr. Simpson's adventures would fill a book. At first he used to do a lot of looking in windows but he soon found that people all acted very much alike under the same circumstances and he could never get over a queer feeling of embarrassment and he would often cling to a window ledge and blush and blush although there was no one to see him. And he knew what was going on in Rochester all right but he soon found that his wife knew from hearsay even more than he did from what he actually saw.

Sometimes he saw people he knew in places where he wouldn't have expected to find them and sometimes he saw strangers in places that he knew very well and that was often even more surprising. But there was a kind of sameness about it all. And yet he felt that he ought to have some purpose in his flights for he had so often preached to his employees the immorality of wasting time that he had got to believing it himself. So as he could think of nothing else to do he began enlarging his collection of match packs.

Of course it was dangerous. He climbed in all sorts of

places looking for match packs and got a good many new ones. He had narrow escapes but his collection grew by leaps and bounds. One night he had a really quite awful experience. He was marooned for two hours in a closet off the bedroom of a Mrs. Evelyn Dasher where he had gone to ground at the approach of footsteps. The footsteps were those of Mrs. Dasher and a gentleman who had come to give an estimate on fixing the cellar stairs. Mr. Simpson was not discovered but when he escaped the west wind had risen.

He was carried high up above the roofs of Rochester still clutching his brief-case and he might have been blown clear across New England and out to sea but just as the last lights of Pittsford were slipping away beneath him a downward gust tumbled him close to the sheds of a brickyard and he flung his grappling iron and it caught and held. With his pockets full of brickbats he flapped back the seven miles to his home.

Well this was pretty scary but it was also exhilarating. He had never flown so high or so long before and he began yearning for even higher and longer flights. Sometimes he didn't care if he ever came down again or not. That was usually after he had had an argument with Mrs. Simpson who was pretty sick of him. Nobody can love a balloon she said. That was the way she talked to him. And business wasn't much good either.

And there was another bad thing. A good many people had caught glimpses of Mr. Simpson bouncing and swooping above Rochester or crawling like a bug up the sides of buildings and there had been quite a lot in the papers about it and even the police though sceptical had taken a hand. Some kind of a peeping Tom they thought he was which hurt Mr. Simpson because he hadn't done what you really could call peeping in some time.

So one night after a specially bad row with his wife Mr. Simpson was sitting on the steeple of the central Presbyterian

Church and saying to himself Why do I put up with it Oh why do I put up with it when there was a bang and a swish and he looked down and saw a cop with a shotgun in the window of a house. Just as he jumped the cop gave him the other barrel but he was a duck-hunting cop and aimed too far ahead and Mr. Simpson merely rocked a little in the wind of the charge.

Well Mr. Simpson had leaped without looking and he came down as softly as a falling leaf in the middle of Main Street which was as bright and crowded as by day for the movies were just letting out. It caused a terrible commotion. Two cars ran up on the sidewalk and six women fainted and before he could soar away from the crowds that rushed at him from all sides he had had been recognised by half a dozen people and to cops not only as Theodore F. Simpson but as the midnight prowler.

Well said Mr. Simpson to himself as he sailed up into the air again with the police pistols banging after him I guess this is the finish and there is no place for me in Rochester any more. For a minute he thought he would just drop his brief-case and float away into the night but he decided to go home first. For he couldn't leave forever without saying good-bye to his match-pack collection. In five minutes he was in his garden and he was just about to climb in the window when his wife's voice said Ted come here from the side porch and he went around and there sat Mrs. Simpson and the wizard.

Well the wizard got up and shook hands and said I have come to release you for I have at last worked out that spell and now if you will just stand still. Stop said Mr. Simpson I must think about this first. Why what nonsense is this said Mrs. Simpson. The police cannot possibly prove anything against you said the wizard and I am prepared to swear that you have been on this porch all evening. Yeah said Mr. Simpson that's all right. Don't be a fool said Mrs. Simpson.

And Mr. Simpson said I'm not going to be. And he

stepped to the edge of the porch and threw down his briefcase and jumped. Mrs. Simpson watched as he went up like a slow rocket and disappeared in the night sky and then she sniffed and went back and sat down. And a week later she married the wizard.

She never heard from Mr. Simpson again. She watched the papers for a while and saw where a hunter in Virginia had seen a great shape swoop over his head in the dawn and had aimed at it thinking it an eagle. But the shape had said Don't shoot and the hunter had thrown down his gun and gone home. And she saw a report from two small Georgia towns of a slow low-flying meteor that had startled the inhabitants by singing and the wizard said that probably Mr. Simpson carried a flashlight and was no doubt taking advantage of prevailing winds to work his way south.

But after that they heard nothing for nearly a year and then a report came from Florida of a revivalist who was converting thousands by means of a real angel who flew over the heads of the congregation and the reporters who saw it said the angel looked like a large man in a nightgown and papier mâché wings but that he really did fly.

And then after ten years came the last report. An explorer came out of the South American jungle with a tale of a flying god whom the Indians worshipped. They called him Simso. The scientific societies and the papers ridiculed the explorer and his reputation suffered badly but he stuck to his story. But that was after the wizard had disappeared again and Mrs. Simpson was living alone. And that was the last ever heard of Mr. Simpson.

MANUEL KOMROFF

*Siamese Hands*





## SIAMESE HANDS

**I** WILL never do it again, master. Never! Never! I swear to you. Believe me this time. It is not my fault!"

"Not your fault! You have had plenty of warning. You stole a box of cartridges last week. You stole from the kitchen supplies. And now you tried to take my watch and the servants caught you. And you tell me it is not your fault."

"Oh, master! I won't do it again! I won't! Never again. And it is not my fault."

"You are just a plain thief. You have had your warning, and now I must turn you over to the old man. There has been too much petty thieving going on in the camp lately and it has got to stop."

"Yes, master. It must stop. I will never do it again."

It was necessary to be firm. The boy had been warned twice before and now . . . My watch was no trifling matter. It was a fine Swiss repeater, and when you touched the lever it would ring the time. At night I kept it under my pillow. It was necessary to be firm with the boy because even the trifling things that from day to day had been filched, many of these were difficult to replace. We were more than a hundred miles from a town and it would no doubt be a month or more before we would be moving the camp.

Our job was to do some surveying for the Siamese Government and some mineral prospecting and assaying. We had

a government permit to do all the hunting we desired, and we were given every possible official consideration. Our camp had one of the best doctors in the country.

We also had a camp ordnance department in charge of an army officer who was responsible to the authorities for our equipment and supplies. But he never interfered in the management of the natives. There was an old man attached to the camp who settled all native disputes. He was held in great reverence, and his word was obeyed.

And so I said: "This dekchai (boy) has evil hands, let the old man do with him what he thinks right."

They led the boy off to the old man and he decided that the boy should be punished without delay.

Soon I heard his piercing cries and I went out into the yard. The boy was on his knees and his wrists were tied so that his arms were around a tree. His hands were whipped with a small green bamboo cane. Cutting blows. He was to get a hundred lashes, but his cries were so loud and piercing that I could not endure it, and I begged the old man to order it stopped.

The native torturer grumbled and said that he had laid on only twenty strokes and mild ones at that. But the old man stayed his arm and the cords that tied his wrists were loosened.

Well, that should have been the end of the whole business, but it was only the beginning. Later in the afternoon the boy stood at my door and asked timidly if he could come into the room. I consented and he came in, kneeled down before me and thanked me.

"They are wild enough already, and if they were beaten and cut up they would not understand it and . . ." Tears streamed down his cheeks.

His hands were on his knees and I looked at them very carefully. They looked more like old man's hands. They

were ugly. The knuckles were large and the skin seemed drawn tight between the joints, and wrinkled. The nails were heavy and curved and the veins stood out and raised up the dark parchment skin.

But the sharp veins may have been due to the severe whipping that they had so recently received.

Tears streamed down his cheeks. "They are not mine, master. No part of me is wild. But they are not mine, and I could not help it. I told you so before, but you would not believe it. I swear to you that the hands did it alone and without me."

"That is not possible. You were warned and I am sorry you had to be punished."

He held up his hands and said: "Look for yourself. They are not mine. But I promise you they will never take anything again. And I want to tell you about the leather boots. They stole them last month."

"Is that so. What else did they take?"

"A lot of things, master. I wanted to tell you, but I was afraid. They took the English knife and fork and also the soap from the wash basin. Fifteen cakes of soap."

Well that explained what happened to the soap. I never knew where it went.

"And what did you do with it all?"

"They buried it. The hands buried it in the ground. It's true, master. I can show you the place. I never sold a thing. It's the truth. They took it and they buried it."

"And you were just an innocent little boy trailing behind a pair of thieving hands."

"Master! They are not mine."

"Whose hands are they?"

Large tears came to his eyes. Then he hung his head in shame and spoke very softly. "They are my father's."

"But your father is dead. How is it possible?"

"He died before I was born."

"What caused his death?"

"He was killed."

"Accidentally?"

"No."

"For stealing?"

He looked full in my face. "Yes, master."

Again I looked down at the hands. They were ugly indeed. They were too old for a boy of sixteen; but the notion that the hands did not belong to him and acted independently was too fantastic. No one could believe such a tale. The tears streamed down his cheeks.

"Now," I said, "the next time you want a piece of soap or something trifling, you must come to me and ask for it. And if I can, I will give it to you."

"No, master, I will never touch anything again, I promise you."

He stood up and was about to go out of the door, but he turned back. "I would ask you for something, master. One of those empty cigar boxes, if you could spare it."

I gave him the cigar box and he ran out into the yard and out of the compound and into the woods.

Early in the morning there was a commotion at the gate. He was more dead than alive. His feet could hardly hold his weight. His hands had been cut off and the stumps were tied with mud-soaked cloths. It was a terrible sight.

They led him to the doctor, who put him to bed in the camp clinic and did everything that he could for him. Later in the afternoon I went to see him. His stumps were bandaged fresh and clean.

As I came into the room he tried to raise his stumps to show them to me as though he were actually proud of what he had done.

"For Heaven's sake, why did you do it?"

"Master, I had to do it. I promised you I would never steal again. You could not trust them. Master, I told you before, they were not mine."

"Well, that is only a notion that has taken root in your mind. Every part of you belongs to you. Who did this evil deed for you?"

"The priest in the hill temple. He knew the hands."

"How did he know the hands?"

"He saw them before. Many years ago. . . . He knew my father."

There was no use going on. Against ignorance and superstition there is no antidote. I made sure he was comfortable and prepared to leave.

"I will be happy now and never cry again."

But there were tears in his eyes as he said it, though they may have come from the pain he suffered rather than the wretchedness of his condition. He had lost a good deal of blood. He was very weak and the doctor said he would have to remain quiet for several weeks.

I went to bed that night feeling very sad and depressed. It was hot. A happy pair of mosquitoes were humming a duet in my ear.

There was a peculiar scratching going on underneath the boards and then there was a dull tapping on the canvas ceiling as though it were a bat in the attic trying to find its way out. The moon was full, but it was clouded over and gave a pale sickly sheen to the landscape that I could see through the mosquito curtain that hung in loose folds at the open door.

I tried hard to sleep but couldn't. The thought of the poor boy and the sight of his stumps came to my mind again and again. And a dreary tapping on the boards; a tapping, scratching, on and off and quick little running sounds along the boards—or was it on the canvas above me? Really one

should be able to tell between a sound of wood or canvas. And one should also distinguish above from below. It is stupid not to be able to recognise a sound more clearly.

But the sound was sometimes very sharp and resounded as though on wood and sometimes quite dull as though on canvas. And as I was trying to figure it out in my mind a new noise made itself heard. And this was the strangest of all. Something had fallen into the wash-basin and was splashing in the water. Splashing and trying hard to scratch the side and scurry to the top.

I reached under my pillow and pressed the lever of my watch. It rang three o'clock and then it rang one minute past. There was no good trying to sleep. I struck a match and lit the lamp beside the bed. At least I lit the wick and in this dim light I saw something. . . . The glass chimney fell from my hand and crashed on the floor.

There was a scurry. A mad rush. Two dark crab-like creatures rushed wildly out of the wash basin and down the side of the table and across the floor. They were brown, their backs arched high in spider fashion and they were covered with a parchment brown skin. Each had five legs with hard pink nails at the tapering ends. There was no mistake about it. They were the Siamese hands! And being wet, they glistened with a sheen and lustre as they scurried across the floor and under the netting and out of the door.

"No. All this is not possible," I kept repeating to myself.

I lit the large hanging lamp. On the floor were the broken fragments of the glass chimney that I had dropped. But also there was a wet track that led from the wash-stand to the door. The wash-basin was filthy. The water was full of mud and the cake of soap was in the water.

My servant heard me moving about and came in from the porch where he slept. He saw the broken glass on the

floor and got a brush and pan. He could not explain the wet tracks on the floor nor the mud in the basin. I told him that I was not certain about what I saw for I could not bring myself to believe it. I should have laughed in anyone's face if he fabricated such a yarn.

"Anyway," I said, "keep a sharp look-out. There are thieves or small animals or something about. They are certain to return."

In the morning the army officer in charge of the stores raised a great hullabaloo. Someone had been into the provisions. Things on the shelves were upset. Small packages had been thrown on the floor and the covers of half a dozen small boxes opened. He did not know what was missing. The lock on the door had not been tampered with and the wire netting on the windows had not been broken.

In the clinic the boy was running a little fever. He was very weak and he was unable to raise his white bandaged stumps. They fed him broth and hot tea with sugar. But he was cheerful and asked for more sugar in the tea because he loved sweets.

I waited until we were alone in the room and then I asked him if he could remember something that might be painful to recall. Would he like to tell me something?

"Anything I know, master, I would tell you."

"What did you do with the hands?"

"The priest put them in the cigar-box."

"And then?"

"Then he buried them in the ground. I saw him do it myself."

That was all I wanted to know.

The rifle was loaded and beside the table. I sat up with a book that night, but nothing happened. And the next night and the third night also nothing happened. I concluded

that the light in the room was perhaps what kept the picking, thieving Siamese hands away.

The next night I was awakened by a strange sound. The soft gentle chime of my watch was ringing right beneath my ear. I could hear it through the pillow. I did not move. It rang the hour, but what hour it was I did not know, for I was not certain when I began counting. But I heard the quarters clearly and then the high little minute bell. The sound was familiar, but how could it ring by itself?

Slowly I passed my hand under the pillow. Then I cried out as loud as I could. They were there! The Siamese hands.

They had the watch and I yanked at the leather fob. The fingers were hard and strong and they grappled with my hands.

The servant awakened by my cries came in with a light, but for a moment he could not see with what I was struggling.

But the light frightened them and they let go of my watch and I could not hold them. The dark brown Siamese hands scurried across the white sheets of the bed and, tumbling to the floor, they started across to the door.

One was already under the netting when I lowered the rifle and had a shot at the tardy one. And I hit it. It jumped a foot in the air and came down with the palm up, and for a fraction of a second it lay stunned, but then with a sudden jerk it turned over and quick as a flash was under the curtain and out into the grass and the black night.

"Call the doctor!" I ordered. "Let him come here and we will tell him everything."

I told the doctor the whole story from the start just as I tell it now. We had breakfast together and decided to bundle the boy, who was now quite on the way to recovery, into a straw sedan chair and have him carried up the hill. The old man, who settled native grievances, went with us. But the temple priest having been warned of our coming and fearing



that he had done something very wrong had fled. However, the boy pointed the way and showed us the spot where the hands were buried.

The ground was soft and loose as the spade turned it over.

"Deeper," said the boy. "Deeper."

And he was right. The cigar-box was there. The cover was broken, but the brown Siamese hands were gone. Now we all set watch for the Siamese hands.

Once more the stores had been rifled and the shelves upset. We blocked up the space under the door and set traps about.

From time to time the Siamese hands were seen by other members of the camp and one morning we found that one of the traps had been sprung, but nothing was inside. It was evident, however, that one of the Siamese hands had been caught, but the other must have come to the rescue and with nimble fingers managed its release.

More than once I left my watch out, as a sort of decoy duck, in the hope of catching the Siamese hands, but they chose other adventures.

The entire camp was terrorised, and the old man tried to pacify and calm the natives.

"The hands," he said, "are only thieving hands. They will not harm anyone. They steal and filch soap and tobacco and such things."

They were seen many times. Now they were seen moving in the grass, now under some dried leaves and again between the exposed roots of a tree. Once they were on the roof of a shed and a great cry was set up, but, before anyone could arrive and those who were close ran away, the Siamese hands were gone.

All in all they were seen more than a dozen times, but the entire camp was so unnerved and so terror-stricken that

every moving blade of grass was watched sharply and suspected of concealing the crab-like Siamese hands. A hundred false alarms were raised.

But there were a dozen times within the month when there was no mistake about it. And at the end of the month we had orders to move the camp and secretly nobody was sorry to leave the place.

Every box, every stick, every roll of canvas and netting, clothes, provisions, equipment—everything to the smallest package was examined by a whole crew before it was moved. The old man put a chalk mark on everything that was examined. This was to make certain that the Siamese hands had not concealed themselves somewhere or other and would suddenly burst in upon us in the new place.

The boy says it was not his fault and it never was his fault and all this proves it, but the doctor says it proves nothing, for he is unable to explain it.

Two years have passed and so far the Siamese hands have not appeared. I hope for the best but I am prepared for the worst.

THOMAS BURKE

*The Horrible God*



## THE HORRIBLE GOD

**M**R. RAINWATER wasn't easily scared, but for the last three or four days he had had a strong feeling that he was being followed, and it was upsetting him. He knew that the feeling of being followed is often a symptom of a neurotic or morbid state, but that wasn't his state. He was quite healthy and free of melodramatic or nervous imaginings. He was being followed. He could feel it through his skin. He could feel it in the air the moment he left his home. He could feel pursuit and the prickings of danger.

Towards midnight that evening his suspicion became certainty. He was walking down Shaftesbury Avenue towards Piccadilly and was in the thick of the crowd coming from the theatres when, clearly and with electrical urgency, a voice reached his ear. It was a keen mutter, and it said: "I speak as a friend. The vengeance of the god Imbrolu is a terrible vengeance. He seeks his own place."

Rainwater turned swiftly. He collided with two girls just behind him who were giggling and talking of Ronald Colman. On one side of him a policeman was striding. On the other side was a wall. Two paces ahead was a newsboy, and walking away from him were a couple of nondescript youths who had evidently been drinking.

As the crowds swirled round him he looked here and there for the possible speaker, but could see nobody to whom that queer mutter could have belonged. It was not an English mutter.

On the opposite side of the street was a large negro in

brilliant blue suit ; in a bus coming from Piccadilly Circus sat a man of ruddy colour and Oriental features ; and outside the Monico, some thirty yards away, was an Algerian rug-seller. But the distance of these men from him made it impossible for any of them to have spoken those words in his ear two seconds ago.

He stood and considered. It was odd ; very odd. The voice had been so sharp and so close that it must have been addressing him. It had come right into his ear, as though the mouth had been touching his shoulder. Yet nobody to whom he could trace it. He knew, of course, the trick of self-effacement ; that sleek movement by which a cat will pass round you before your eyes without your seeing it, and which certain people can achieve by a cessation of mental action. He attributed the vanishing of the speaker to that, and he had reason for believing that the speaker was not English. The message, he was sure, was meant for him, and no other person in the crowd ; he was sure that it connected with his feeling of being followed, and that everything connected with that horrible idol.

The idol had been worrying Rainwater for some time—even before the following had begun. It was an idol of a kind he had never before seen ; an idol which gave him the shudders every time he looked at it. As a collector of native bric-à-brac, he was accustomed, even hardened, to the many variations upon certain themes of which the black mind, in its more exalted fervours, is capable.

But this . . . The most cloistered nun, knowing nothing of the images by which men express the baseness of man, would have known at a glance that this thing was in form and spirit horrible. The most experienced Madame of a Buenos Aires sailors' hotel would not have confused it with the realistic emblems of native religions which her customers brought from their voyages and with which they improved her

knowledge of anthropology. It was just a masterpiece of unrelated horror.

The artist who made it had withdrawn from the unfenced fields of religious ardour and had immured himself within the narrow dogmas of art—just to show, apparently, that art, with all its fetters of form and technique, could outsoar anything achieved under the licence and tolerance by which the darker religions distinguish themselves from art.

Certainly he had succeeded. Never had Rainwater, under that cloak of respectability which hides so many anomalies, even imagined anything like it. Nor had anybody else whom he knew. Of all his acquaintance among curators of museums, not one could put a name to it or even conjecture the country or island of its origin. When he showed it to them they stared and whistled.

And that was all he could get from them. They could tell him that it wasn't Egypt, that it wasn't Java, that it wasn't Easter Island, or Haiti, or Liberia ; but they couldn't tell him what it *was*. They could only tell him that he'd better put it away or throw it away.

He put it away at the bottom of one of his curio cabinets. He couldn't give it away, because nobody he knew would have accepted it. All his friends were married.

And as a collector he couldn't bring himself to throw it away. Yet, in keeping it in his rooms, he felt a distinct unease as though in possessing it he were partly responsible for its horror and had had a share in making it.

He *wanted* to throw it away, or burn it, or drop it over one of the bridges, but whenever he reached the point of setting out to do it, the collecting instinct mastered him. If the thing had been emitting an evil smell into his room he still wouldn't have been able to screw himself up to throwing it away. So he kept it locked up, and only took it out now and then, which made him feel more guilty.

If a friend was announced he would hurriedly hide it. If he heard his housekeeper's step outside the door he would throw a newspaper over it. When he had had it for three weeks his demeanour had become almost furtive.

And then began that feeling of being followed and its climax of that muttered message. He wished he had never seen the wretched thing, or, having seen it, had resisted the temptation to buy it. The thing itself was a horror and now it was leading to this uncanny following and this uncanny message delivered in a crowded street. He didn't know what to do about it.

It wasn't the threat that disturbed him so much as the stealthy following and the manner in which the threat had been delivered. If it was the ju-ju of some tribe or creed with representatives in London why couldn't they come to him openly? Why the following about, which had begun apparently from the moment he bought it, when he had been followed to his home? And how could he put the little hideous god back in his own place when nobody, not even scholars, knew whence it came?

He walked on in some disturbance. Every now and then he looked back or stopped by a shop whose side-window reflected the path behind him, but he saw nobody who might be the follower, and did not expect to. Whoever had been following him the last few days was an experienced shadower; clever enough to convey the horrid sense of his neighbourhood and clever enough to remain unperceived.

Mr. Rainwater was beginning to realise that there is something in being followed which is more shocking than a revolver at the head or a knife at the throat. There is nothing to grasp; nothing to combat; only a persistent nagging at the nerves, which in time can wear you down.

And Rainwater was being worn down. If they wanted their god they could have it, so far as he was concerned. He



couldn't throw an artistic treasure away, but if it meant something more to people than it did to him they were welcome to it, if only they would come and ask for it. They must know his address or they wouldn't be able to follow him as they did. Why, then, this menacing and muttering of vengeance?

On reaching home he learned that they did know his address. His housekeeper met him in the hall. She held a grubby piece of pink paper. "I don't know what this is, sir, or how it came. I found it on the mat under the evening paper. Would it be anything you know about?" She passed it to him. It bore six words in an ungainly scrawl: "Imbrolu waits. You have been warned."

Mr. Rainwater made a noise of irritation.

He passed it back to her. "No, I don't know anything about it. Some odd bit of waste paper that blew in, I should think." But he went upstairs feeling a little sick. When he got to his room he went first to the little cabinet in which he kept the horrible thing.

The room was filled with the results of his collecting mania. They hung on the walls, they stood on tables and they decorated half a dozen glass cabinets; tribal work mainly, all of it bizarre. The horrible thing was not resting in one of the glass cabinets. It was in an old lacquer cabinet—a nest of drawers three times concealed within other drawers. He had just opened it and had reached the drawer containing the thing when, without conscious impulse, he went to the window and moved the curtain aside. He moved it aside casually; he dropped it swiftly.

On the opposite pavement under the overhanging trees of a front garden was a motionless figure. The figure was dressed in a raincoat, and its soft hat had the brim turned down. To see the face was impossible, but something about the nose of the figure conveyed to Mr. Rainwater the sense of alien

ideas. He turned from the window, shut all the drawers and doors of the cabinet, without looking to see if his treasure was there, and dropped into a chair by the fire.

He had scarcely dropped when he got up again ; found a glass ; and mixed himself a drink. He went back to the chair with it, and dropped again. He wasn't a coward and he wasn't a man of stout nerve. He was like most of us, in-between, and ready to admit when he was shaken. He was a mild and amiable man, but could, as mild and amiable people can, be capable of ferocity when really roused and when there was some concrete object of his ferocity.

Such a man who insisted on having a window of a railway carriage closed on a warm day.

But against intangible hostility, or against anything unfamiliar, he was a reed. His heart didn't give way, but his nerves did. None of the incidents of the last four days had made him afraid, but they had brought him to the edge of a breakdown. He needed a drink.

Sitting there in the midnight silence he began to hear, or to think he could hear, odd noises from the street. Little soft noises, of the kind that make people ask each other in whispers—"What's that?" Once or twice, without knowing why, he looked over at the lacquer cabinet, and found himself relieved to see that it was still there and still a lacquer cabinet.

He wanted to go to the window again, but couldn't. He wanted to know if the figure had gone, but there was the possibility that he would see it standing in the same position ; and he didn't want to see it. There was nothing in the figure itself or in its attitude to disturb anyone. It was just a solitary and motionless man, yet its mere presence conveyed a stream of menace and portent and alarm which was the more potent for being obscure.

It created that shrinking of the skin which man always knows before the nameless peril. In its immobility it was

horrid, and Mr. Rainwater didn't want to see it. Also, he had a feeling that, horrid as it was in stillness, it would fill him with the more horror if it moved.

He wanted to go to bed, but couldn't. He had half an idea of taking the horrible idol from the cabinet, opening the window, and flinging it out to the watcher. But if it fell in the roadway it might smash, and that might mean more of this furtive persecution. And he felt that he couldn't stand much more of it. He was accustomed to a peaceful life, and he could not adjust himself to this invasion of his peace.

Somehow or other he must get rid of the thing. He couldn't give it to a museum, because that might bring persecution on the museum's curator, and if he burnt it or dropped it in the river, he still wouldn't be free of their attentions. And he couldn't hand it over to them because they never came near enough to him. If he took it out now, and went downstairs to give it to the solitary watcher, he was certain that the solitary watcher would have vanished.

But about three o'clock in the morning, after his third drink, which had done his nerves little good, an idea came to him. A simple idea which should have come to him when the persecution began. He would pass it to the people most able to deal with the situation. He would resell it to the shop where he bought it, at any price they cared to give. It was a dim little shop, kept by two swarthy old men who looked as though they could understand and answer any roundabout messages.

On that resolution he went to bed, not caring whether the house was surrounded, or whether he was to be burgled or assassinated, or not. He was beyond caring. His nerves had jittered so much under the persecution, and had developed such a side-jittering from the three heavy drinks, that they were now exhausted. Anything could happen, but Mr. Rainwater was going to bed.

Nothing did happen ; and after a miniature breakfast he took the horrible god from the private drawer of the cabinet, packed it carefully in tissue-paper, put it into his overcoat pocket, and set out for the shop, followed, he was sure, all the way.

He did not get rid of it so easily as he had hoped. The partners were not in a buying mood. When he offered it, saying that he was tired of it, and that it was not in keeping with the rest of his collection, they hesitated. They answered as curio-dealers always do ; they did not want it. Those things, they said, were not easy to sell. When they could sell that kind of thing they got a good price, but they might have to keep it in stock for a year, two years, five years, before finding a customer. They had had it in stock for three years before Mr. Rainwater bought it.

Mr. Rainwater asked : would they make an offer ? They replied that they would hardly dare. The offer would be too ridiculous. They really did not want it ; the small demand for such things made it impossible to offer a price at all relative to the artistic value of the thing.

Mr. Rainwater said sternly : "Name a price."

Under compulsion they named, with confusion and apology, ten shillings.

"I'll take it." He pushed the horrible god across the counter. They tendered, across the counter, sadly and with deprecation, a ten-shilling note. He took it ; said "Good morning" ; and walked out into the morning sun.

Outside he took a deep breath, said "That's that, thank God," and walked away as though liberated from clanking chains. He walked all the way to his club, and did not once have the feeling of being followed. This restoration of his normal life filled him with the holiday spirit, and he spent the ten shillings, and more, in a super-excellent lunch.

\*     \*     \*     \*     \*

That evening in the little shop the partners smiled at each other. "Yes," said one, "we have done well with this thing which the English sailor carved for us. Eight times we have sold it, and eight times we have frightened the buyer into bringing it back." In a mocking sing-song he recited : " ' The vengeance of the god Imbrolu is a terrible vengeance. He seeks his own place. . . . ' These superstitious English ! "



MICHAEL JOSEPH

*The Yellow Cat*





## THE YELLOW CAT

IT all began when Grey was followed home, inexplicably enough, by the strange, famished yellow cat. The cat was thin, with large, intense eyes which gleamed amber in the forlorn light of the lamp on the street corner. It was standing there as Grey passed, whistling dejectedly, for he had had a depressing run of luck at Grannie's tables, and it made a slight piteous noise as it looked up at him. Then it followed at his heels, creeping along as though it expected to be kicked unceremoniously out of the way.

Grey did, indeed, make a sort of half-threatening gesture when, looking over his shoulder, he saw the yellow cat behind.

"If you were a black cat," he muttered, "I'd welcome you—but get out!"

The cat's melancholy amber eyes gleamed up at him, but it made no sign and continued to follow. This would have annoyed Grey in his already impatient humour, but he seemed to find a kind of savage satisfaction in the fact that he was denied even the trifling consolation of a good omen. Like all gamblers, he was intensely superstitious, although he had had experience in full measure of the futility of all supposedly luck-bringing mascots. He carried a monkey's claw sewn in the lining of his waistcoat pocket, not having the courage to throw it away. But this wretched yellow cat that ought to have been black did not irritate him as might have been expected.

He laughed softly ; the restrained, unpleasant laugh of a man fighting against misfortune.

"Come on, then, you yellow devil ; we'll sup together."

He took his gloveless hand from his coat-pocket and beckoned to the animal at his heels ; but it took as little notice of his gesture of invitation as it had of his menacing foot a moment before. It just slid along the greasy pavement, covering the ground noiselessly, not deviating in the slightest from the invisible path it followed, without hesitation.

It was a bitterly cold, misty night, raw and damp. Grey shivered as he thrust his hand back into the shelter of his pocket and hunched his shoulders together.

With a shudder of relief he turned into the shelter of the courtyard which lay between the icy street and the flight of stairs which led to his room. As he stumbled numbly over the rough cobblestones of the yard he suddenly noticed that the yellow cat had disappeared.

He was not surprised and gave no thought whatever to the incident until, a few minutes later, at the top of the ramshackle stairs, the feeble light of a hurricane lamp revealed the creature sitting, or rather lying, across the threshold of his door.

He took an uncertain step backward. He said to himself : "That's odd." The cat looked up at him impassively with brooding, sullen eyes. He opened the door, stretching over the animal to turn the crazy handle.

Silently the yellow cat rose and entered the shadowy room. There was something uncanny, almost sinister in its smooth, noiseless movements. With fingers that shook slightly, Grey fumbled for matches, struck a light, and, closing the door behind him, lit the solitary candle.

He lived in this one room, over a mews which had become almost fashionable since various poverty-stricken people, whose names still carried some weight with the bourgeois

tradesmen of this Mayfair backwater, had triumphantly installed themselves.

Grey, although he would never have admitted it, was a cardsharper and professional gambler. But even a cardsharper needs a little ordinary luck. Night after night he watched money pass into the hands of "the pigeons," ignorant, reckless youngsters, and foolish old women who, having money to burn, ought by all the rules of the game to have lost. Yet when playing with him, Grey, a man respected even among the shabby fraternity of those who live by their wits, they won. He had turned to roulette, but even with a surreptitious percentage interest in the bank, he had lost. His credit was exhausted. Grannie herself had told him he was a regular Jonah. He was cold, hungry and desperate. Presently his clothes, his last possession, would betray him.

His room contained a wooden bed and a chair. A rickety table separated them. The chair served Grey at a wardrobe; on the table stood a candle with a few used matches which he used to light the cheap cigarettes he smoked in bed; the grease had a habit of adhering to the tobacco when the candle was used, and Grey was fastidious. The walls were bare save for a cupboard, a pinned-up *Sporting Life* Racing Calendar and two cheap reproductions of Kirchner's midinettes. There was no carpet on the floor. A piece of linoleum stretched from the empty grate to the side of the bed.

At first Grey could not see the cat, but the candle, gathering strength, outlined its shadow grotesquely against the wall. It was crouched on the end of the bed.

He lighted one of the used matches and lit the small gas-ring which was the room's sole luxury. Gas was included in the few shillings he paid weekly for rent; consequently Grey used it for warmth. He seldom used it to cook anything, as neither whisky (which he got by arrangement with one

of Grannie's waiters), bread nor cheese, which formed his usual diet, requires much cooking.

The cat moved and, jumping noiselessly on to the floor, cautiously approached the gas-ring, by the side of which it stretched its lean yellowish body. Very softly but plaintively it began to mew.

Grey cursed it. Then he turned to the cupboard and took out a cracked jug. He moved the bread on to his own plate and poured out the little milk it contained in the shallow bread-plate.

The cat drank, not greedily but with the fierce rapidity which betokens hunger and thirst. Grey watched it idly as he poured whisky into a cup. He drank and refilled the cup. He then began to undress, carefully, in order to prolong the life of his worn dinner-jacket.

The cat looked up. Grey, taking off his shirt, beneath which, having no vest, he wore another woollen shirt, became uncomfortably aware of its staring yellow eyes. Seized with a crazy impulse, he poured the whisky from his cup into the remainder of the milk in the plate.

"Share and share alike," he cried. "Drink, you ——"

Then the yellow cat snarled at him; the vilest, loathsome sound; and Grey for a moment was afraid.

Then he laughed, as if at himself for allowing control to slip, and finished undressing.

The cat went back to its place at the foot of the bed, its eyes gleaming warily in Grey's direction. He restrained his impulse to throw it out of the room and clambered between the rough blankets without molesting it.

By daylight the cat was an ugly, misshapen creature. It had not moved from the bed. Grey regarded it with amused contempt.

Usually the morning found him profoundly depressed and irritable. For some unaccountable reason he felt now almost light-hearted.

He dressed, counted his money and decided to permit himself the luxury of some meagre shopping in the adjacent market, which supplied the most expensive restaurant proprietors with the cheapest food.

The cat, still crouching on the bed, made no attempt to follow him, and he closed the door as softly as its erratic hinges would allow, aware that the cat's eyes still gazed steadily in his direction.

In the market he obeyed an impulse to buy food for the cat, and at the cost of a few pence added a portion of raw fish to his purchases. On the way home he cursed himself for a fool, and would have thrown the fish away, the clumsy paper wrapping having become sodden with moisture, when he was hailed by a voice he had almost forgotten.

"Grey! Just the man I want to see!"

Grey greeted him with a fair show of amiability, although, if appearance were any indication, the other was even less prosperous than himself. He, too, had been an *habitué* of Grannie's in the old days, but had long since drifted out on the sea of misfortune. Despite his shabby appearance, he turned to Grey and said:

"You'll have a drink?" Then, noting Grey's dubious glance, he laughed and added: "It's on me all right. I've just touched lucky."

A little later Grey emerged from the public-house on the corner the richer by five pounds, which the other had insisted on lending him in return for past favours.

What exactly the past favours had been, Grey was too dazed to inquire; as far as he could recollect he had always treated the man with scant courtesy. He did not even remember his name.

He was still trying to remember who the man was when he climbed the stairs. He knew him well enough, for Grey was the type who never forgets a face. It was when his eyes alighted on the yellow cat that he suddenly remembered.

The man was Felix Mortimer. And Felix Mortimer had shot himself during the summer!

At first Grey tried to assure himself that he had made a mistake. Against his better judgment, he tried to convince himself that the man merely bore a strong resemblance to Felix Mortimer. But at the back of his mind *he knew*.

Anyway, the five-pound note was real enough. He methodically placed the fish in a saucepan and lit the gas-ring. Presently the cat was eating, in that curious, deliberate way it had drunk the milk the night before. Its emaciated appearance plainly revealed that it was starving; yet it devoured the fish methodically, as though now assured of a regular supply.

Grey, turning the five-pound note in his hand, wondered whether the cat had after all changed his luck. But his thoughts kept reverting to Felix Mortimer. . . .

The next few days left him in no doubt. At Grannie's that night fortune's pendulum swung back unmistakably. He won steadily.

"Your luck's changed—with a vengeance!" said one of the "regulars" of the shabby genteel saloon.

"With a vengeance," echoed Grey, and paused, wondering, with the superstition of a born gambler, if there were significance in the phrase.

His success was the prelude to the biggest slice of luck, to use his own phrase, that he had ever known. He gambled scientifically, not losing his head, methodically banking a proportion of his gains each morning; planning, scheming, striving to reach that high-water mark at which, so he told

himself with the gambler's time-worn futility, he would stop and never gamble again.

Somehow he could not make up his mind to leave the poverty-stricken room in the fashionable mews. He was terribly afraid it would spell a change of luck. He tried to improve it, increase its comfort, but it was significant that he bought first a basket and a cushion for the yellow cat.

For there was no doubt in his mind that the cat was the cause of his sudden transition from poverty to prosperity.

He fed it regularly, waiting on it himself as though he were its willing servant. He made a spasmodic attempt to caress it, but the cat snarled savagely at him and, frightened, he left it alone. If the cat ever moved from the room, he never saw it go.

He accepted the situation philosophically enough. He would talk to the cat of himself, his plans for the future, the new people he met—for money had speedily unlocked more exalted doors than Grannie's—all this in the eloquence derived from wine and solitude, he would pour out into the unmoved ears of the cat, crouching at the foot of the bed. And then, without daring to speak of it, he would think of Felix Mortimer and the gift that had proved the turning-point of his fortunes.

The creature watched him impassively, contemptuously indifferent to his raving or his silence. But the weird *ménage* continued, and Grey's luck held good.

He was now within reach of that figure which he fondly imagined would enable him to forsake his precarious existence. He told himself that he was now, to all intents and purposes, safe. And he decided to move into more civilised and appropriate surroundings.

Nevertheless, he himself procured an expensive wicker contraption to convey the yellow cat from the garret to his newly acquired and, by contrast, luxurious maisonette. It

was furnished in abominable taste, but the reaction from sheer poverty had its effect. And then he had begun to drink more than was good for a man who required a cool head and a steady nerve for at least part of a day which was really night.

One day he had cause to congratulate himself on his new home. For he met, for the first time in his thirty odd years of life, a woman.

Now Grey divided women into two classes. There were "the regulars"—soulless creatures with the gambler's fever and crook's alphabet—and "pigeons," foolish women, some young, most of them old, who flourished their silly but valuable plumage to be plucked by such as he.

But Elise Dyer was different. She stirred his pulses with a strange, exquisite sensation. Her incredibly fair hair, flaxen as waving corn, her fair skin, her deep violet eyes and her delicate carmine mouth provoked him into a state of unaccustomed bewilderment.

They talked one night of mascots. Grey, who had never mentioned the yellow cat to a soul, whispered that he would, if she cared, show her the mascot that had brought him his now proverbial good luck. The girl agreed with eager enthusiasm to his diffident suggestion to go with him to his flat; and he, in his strange simplicity, stammered that she would do him honour. He had forgotten that Elise Dyer knew him for a rich man.

Elated by his triumph, he paid her losses and called for champagne. The girl plied him skilfully with wine, and presently he was more drunk than he had been since the beginning of his era of prosperity.

They took a cab to the flat. Grey felt that he had reached the pinnacle of triumph.

He switched on the light and the girl crossed his threshold. The room which they entered was lavishly illuminated, the



lights shaded into moderation by costly fabrics. The room, ornate and over-furnished, reflected money. The girl gave a gasp of delight.

For the first time the cat seemed aware of something unusual. It stretched itself slowly and stood up, regarding them with a fierce light in its eyes.

The girl screamed.

"For God's sake take it away!" she cried. "I can't bear it! I can't be near it. Take that damned cat away!" And she began to sob wildly, piteously, retreating towards the door.

At this Grey lost all control and, cursing wildly, shouting bestial things at the oncoming animal, seized it by the throat.

"Don't—don't cry, dearie," panted Grey, holding the cat; I'll settle this swine soon enough. Wait for me!" And he staggered through the open door.

Grey ran through the deserted streets. The cat had subsided under the clutch of his fingers and lay inert, its yellowish fur throbbing. He scarcely knew where he was going. All he realised was an overwhelming desire to be rid of the tyranny of this wretched creature he held by the throat.

At last he knew where he was going. Not far from Grey's new establishment ran the Prince's Canal, that dark, sluggish stream that threads its way across the fashionably residential district of the outlying West. To the canal he ran, and without hesitation he threw the yellow cat into the water.

The next day he realised what he had done. At first he was afraid, half hoping that the superstitious spasm of fear would pass. But a vivid picture swam before his eyes, the broken surface of a sluggish dream. . . .

"You're a coward," she taunted him. "Why don't you act like a man? Go to the tables and see for yourself that you can still win in spite of your crazy cat notions!"

At first he refused, vehemently ; but it gradually dawned on him that therein lay his chance of salvation.

That night he received a vociferous welcome on his return to the Green Baize Club.

It was as he feared. He lost steadily.

Then suddenly an idea came to him. Supposing the cat were still alive? Why hadn't he thought of that before? Why, there was a saying that every cat had nine lives! For all he knew it might have swum safely to the bank and got away.

His feverish impulse crystallised into action. He hurriedly left the club and beckoned to a passing taxicab.

After what seemed interminable delay he reached the spot where he had madly flung the cat away from him. The stillness of the water brought home to him the futility of searching for the animal here. This was not the way to set to work.

The thing preyed on his mind in the days that followed. Exhaustive inquiries failed to discover the least trace of the yellow cat.

Night after night he went to the tables, lured there by the maddening thought that if only he could win he would drug the torment and be at peace. But he lost. . . .

And then a strange thing happened.

One night, returning home across a deserted stretch of the park, he experienced a queer, irresistible impulse to lift his feet from the grass and make for the gravel path. He resented the impulse, fought against it; he was cold and worn out, and by cutting across the grass he would save many minutes of wearying tramping. But the thing—like a mysterious blind instinct—persisted, and in the end he found himself running, treading gingerly on the sodden grass.

The next day Grey did not get out of his bed until late in the afternoon.

He crossed the room in search of his dressing-gown and caught sight of himself in the glass of his wardrobe. Only then did he realise that he was clambering over the floor with his head near the carpet, his hands outstretched in front of him. He stood upright with difficulty and reached a shaking hand for brandy.

It took him two hours to struggle into his clothes, and by the time he was ready to go out it was nearly dark. He crept along the street. The shops were closing. He saw nothing of them until he reached the corner, where he halted abruptly, with a queer sensation of intense hunger. On the cold marble before him lay unappetising slabs of raw fish. His body began to quiver with suppressed desire. Another moment and nothing could have prevented him seizing the fish in his bare hands when the shutters of the shop dropped noisily across the front of the sloping marble surface.

Grey knew that something had happened, that he was very ill. Now that he could not see the vision of the yellow cat, his mind was a blank. Somehow he retraced his footsteps and got back to his room.

The bottle of brandy stood where he had left it. He had not turned on the light, but he could see it plainly. He dragged it to his lips.

With a crash it went to ~~the~~ floor, while Grey leapt into the air, savage with nausea. He felt that he was choking. With an effort he pulled himself together, to find that it was beyond his power to stop the ghastly whining sound that issued from his lips. He tried to lift himself on to the bed, but in sheer exhaustion collapsed on the floor, where he lay still in an attitude not human.

The room lightened with the dawn and a new day passed before the thing on the floor moved. Something of the clarity of vision which comes to starving men now possessed him. He stared at his hands.

The fingers seemed to have withered ; the nails had almost disappeared, leaving a narrow streak of hornish substance forming in their place. He tore himself frantically towards the window. In the fading light he saw that the backs of his hands were covered with a thin, almost invisible surface of coarse, yellowish fur.

Unimaginable horrors seized him. He knew now that the scarlet thread of his brain was being stretched to breaking point. Presently it would snap. . . .

Unless—unless. The yellow cat alone could save him. To this last human thought he clung, in an agony of terror.

Unconscious of movement, he crept swiftly into the street, his shapeless eyes peering in the darkness which surrounded him.

Down the silent bank he scrambled headlong, towards the still water. The dawn's pale radiance threw his shadow into a grotesque pattern. On the edge of the canal he halted, his hands embedded in the sticky crumbling earth, his head shaking, his eyes searching in agonised appeal into the depths of the motionless water.

There he crouched, searching, searching. . . .

And there in the water he saw the yellow cat.

He stretched out the things that were his arms, while the yellow cat stretched out its claws to enfold him in the broken mirror of the water.

G. B. STERN

*Quiet Corner*



## QUIET CORNER

**I** WAS trying to find space in my address book to squeeze in one more name, but it was no good. The book had been in use for over ten years, and was as packed as the inside of an omnibus in the rush hour of a rainy day.

Alison said to me, firmly, looking over my shoulder : "It's no good, Brian, you must surrender, and start a new one. Here you are !" And from a drawer in her desk she produced like a conjurer's trick a most unfriendly looking new address book, clean and glazed and empty. "I've been keeping it in reserve for months," she added, a little maliciously, well knowing my nonchalant habit of saying "yes" to her suggestions, and then postponing action indefinitely. "And now, as it's a rainy afternoon . . ."

So I sat down and started copying out old addresses into the new book. It is one of the most sentimental occupations in the world. Some of your friends are dead ; with some you have quarrelled ; from others you have just drifted apart. Alison was unsympathetic when I sprayed her, like a fountain, with my thin sad wailings from the past.

"I'm going to leave you alone," she announced, presently ; "all alone, to cry, and sing, 'It's only a beautiful picture !' Otherwise you'll never get the job done, with all these reminiscences."

A few of the names were dead wood in my memory. Uncanny, to stare at two or three lines in your own handwriting and to have forgotten why they are there and of what you were thinking at the time when you jotted them down.

One, in particular :

Ferdinand Moore,  
c/o George Agnew, Esq.,  
Rest Harrow,  
Chesham.

Who the devil was Ferdinand Moore, Rest Harrow, Chesham? How the devil did he get into my address-book? The name awoke just a faint tremor of remembrance; the address none at all. I had no association with Chesham, nor with George Agnew.

Therefore I did not copy it into my new address-book. Nevertheless, I continued hopefully to wring my mind as one wrings a cloth to extract one more drop of moisture. . . . Ferdinand Moore? . . . Ferdinand? . . . Perversely, I resented his presence among so many pleasant people whom I had known quite well. The entry was not recent, of course; I have said already that the book dated back over ten years. The unknown Mr. Moore was fairly near the beginning of the M's.

When Alison came in again I asked her casually: "By the way, Alison, d'you happen to know what's become of old Moore?"

"Do you mean the almanac man?" she asked. "I expect he's all right. Why?"

"No. Oh, no. I mean Ferdie Moore. Old Ferdie."

Alison shook her head, and said that she had never heard of him.

"It doesn't matter."

But it went on bothering me all the same. To find out exactly who was Ferdinand Moore and how he came to be nestling so snugly in my old address-book grew to be a sort of obsession in my mind. It nagged on and on.

Finally, to get rid of it, I wrote to Ferdinand Moore. The letter was, I think, quite ingenious. I wrote that it was



so long since we had met ; and how had he fared since those days ? Was he still doing the same thing ? Had he moved, or did he still live in the same old place ? I asked him how all the others were, and I wrote that I would so much like to have some news of him, for I often thought of him—"although we have drifted so far apart !"

This seemed to me safe. Of course, he might have been a plumber employed by me at some crisis or other, and in that case he would be surprised to get my lines of tender inquiry. But I tested the name of Ferdinand Moore several times on my subconscious, and the reactions were not plumber-like. Then, without confessing to Alison the absurd lengths to which maddened curiosity had driven me, I posted the letter and waited.

By the time the answer came, which was about ten days later, other incidents had rushed up, and I had nearly forgotten again about the whole business. As is my habit on receiving a letter in an unfamiliar handwriting, I turned first to the signature : "F. Carlyon Moore." Curiosity leapt up again, exultant. My foolish little mystery was about to be solved. I turned to the first page. There, on top, was the address. And that at once solved it, without further proving :

"Quiet Corner,"

Wonniton Sands,

S. Devon.

Of course ! Of course ! "Quiet Corner." *That* was Ferdinand Moore !

Alison and I had not been married long, and her parents were to stay with us for their summer holidays, together with her young sister, Kathleen. We had spent some time already looking for a suitable house, and Alison had said to me : "Brian, darling, we can't possibly live even for two months

in a house called 'Quiet Corner,' 'Quiet Corner!' Think of it!"

I certainly did think it rather unnecessarily wayward and sweet and intimate; nevertheless, furnished houses by the sea were none too easy to get during July and August, and I liked the photograph of the garden which the owner enclosed when answering our advertisement. And there were the right number of bedrooms.

So Alison and I went down, not unhopefully, to look at it. It really was a charming old house. "Rambling" is the word used to describe this type of building. Distinctly it rambled.

It stood on the edge of a village, about a mile from the sea. And there were practically no pictures on the walls. This was greatly in its favour. Only, in the drawing-room, one rather charming landscape in needlework.

The garden, again to use an overworked phrase, was "tangled." It was rather badly tangled, and nearly everything was in the spot where you least expected it. Nevertheless, I liked Dorothy Perkins in the orchard, and the herbaceous border of potatoes growing up against the old red wall.

Ferdinand Moore showed us round himself. He said that he expected his wife back at any minute, and apologised almost too much, especially in the larders and pantries and at the linen cupboard. He said she knew so much more than he did about these matters. He certainly seemed to be very dependent upon his wife; his own contacts with the world were a little vague and precious.

He was tall and thin and he stooped. But his complexion was not the parchment hue of a scholar, as one rather expected; on the contrary, it was reddish, and clashed with the sandy red of his hair. He had near-sighted blue eyes, with spectacles, and his nose was high and conceited. To tell the truth, I did not care much for Ferdinand Moore, yet he seemed very anxious not only that we should rent his house, but that we

should be happy and comfortable in it. The bedroom which Alison loved so much he said belonged to his wife.

"She keeps it very tidy."

For it had a fresh, untenanted look which was rather more as though it were waiting for someone to step into it than of someone who had just stepped out. . . . "She can't bear disorder; can't bear it! can't bear it!" repeated Mr. Moore emphatically. And yet the rest of the house was not by any means tidy. We were, however, definitely attracted and told him that it suited us, and that we would probably take it, but would let him know for certain in two or three days.

"Can't you possibly wait any longer, now? A few minutes only? My wife——"

But we had a train to catch. Just at the door Alison, who is sometimes twisted by strange caprices, looked back at him and remarked: "*You* named this house, didn't you, Mr. Moore? *You*, not your wife?"

He appeared gratified. "Indeed, yes. *I* named it. 'Quiet Corner.' My idea of a little haven, Mrs. Perry. No wrangling, no strife, no disharmony, no angry voices. Just a quiet corner. I tried 'Quiet Haven' at first, but then it occurred to me that 'Corner' gave it quaintness."

"Yes," Alison agreed, very seriously. "Corners *are* quaint. I've noticed it. Well, good-bye, Mr. Moore. Thank you so much. We'll write."

"*What* a beast!" she exclaimed, as soon as we were out of his hearing. She was very little more than twenty then, and rushed to swift conclusions. "My word, I'm sorry for his wife."

"Oh, he's not so bad." I was six years older, and therefore, no doubt, six years more tolerant. "Not exactly lovable, but——"

"Lovable? He's leavable."

We took the house. It really was just what we wanted,

and the furniture luckily did not include Mr. Moore himself. Alison wrote to Mrs. Moore once, making housewifely inquiries about plate and linen and the like. And Mr. Moore replied for his wife, that she was so sorry to have missed us, having arrived shortly after we had left ; and that now, most unfortunately, she had been called away again to nurse her sister, but expected to be at the house to welcome us on arrival, and to show and explain all that was necessary.

But when we arrived at "Quiet Corner," Alison and I, her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Lane, and Kathleen, her young sister, the house was solitary. We had the keys ; the agent's boy had met us at the station of the town three miles away ; but, shambling and uncouth, he had nothing to say to us, either about "Quiet Corner" or its owners.

Lying on the hall table was a note from Ferdinand Moore. He said that he and his wife regretted deeply that they had been prevented from welcoming us in person, his wife especially, as she had not yet had the pleasure, etc., but that she hoped we would find everything in full order ; if we had to communicate with him his address was : c/o George Agnew, Esq., Rest Harrow, Chesham.

It was Kathleen who first gave voice to the strangely uneasy feeling which possessed us all with regard to "Quiet Corner" and Mr. Ferdinand Moore. She plumped it out thoughtlessly in front of the old people, which was a mistake, because Mrs. Lane was inclined to be tremulous once the aspens of her fancy had been set shaking. And it was mainly on her account that we had wanted this tranquil holiday, for she had had a hard time nursing her husband after an operation.

Kathleen said : "I don't believe there *is* a Mrs. Moore. I believe that awful man you told us about has made her up."

"Don't be an ass, Kathleen. One can't make up a wife."

"I don't see why one can't. You've never seen her, have you, Brian?"

"No, but——"

"And Alison didn't get a letter from her, did she? Even when she wrote to her direct? Well, then," Kathleen finished triumphantly, "there you are!" And she added in her off-hand way: "I expect he murdered her, you know, and doesn't want to tell anyone."

Poor Mrs. Lane began to flutter. I soothed her as well as I could, and waited till I was alone with Alison before bringing up the subject again.

"The queer part of it is," said Alison, "that I believe Kathleen's right. No, not about the murder, of course; but I could swear to it that there has been no mistress of this house for some time now. Oh, I can't tell you how I know. Little things, millions of them. Call it woman's intuition if you like; it's common sense really. After all, every intimate object we touch and use belonging to other people is bound to tell something of its history."

My own instincts tallied with hers, but I would not admit too quickly that young Kathleen could be right about anything.

Why, I argued, should a man, if he had no wife, insist upon her existence over and over again, and all the time in that nervous, emphatic sort of way? "For it's not likely that we should have refused to take the house simply because there wasn't a Mrs. Moore. There's nothing disgraceful in being a widower. But he gave me a sensation as though his wife were sort of imminent . . . if we could only have waited two minutes longer . . ."

Alison nodded. "Yes. Yes. That's just it, Brian. He over-stressed her. Don't say anything more in front of Mother. As you say, it doesn't really matter to us whether there ever was a Mrs. Ferdinand Moore or not."

\*     \*     \*     \*     \*

But it mattered to the extent of having us out of the house

in just over a week. It is a short way from murder to a ghost . . . and the less we had seen of a flesh-and-blood Mrs. Moore the more sinister swelled the convictions of her troubled wraith. She was all over that house. The weather was bad, and we had to huddle round a fire. And were glad of the excuse for huddling.

When you begin to make pretexts to ask someone to go upstairs with you, or hold a lamp while you fetch Granny's shawl, you are lost. And Kathleen, from whom one would have expected a bolder spirit, quaked even more than the rest of the party. We were unhappily conscious of something ominously unquiet in "Quiet Corner" even before rumours and whisperings inevitably filtered through, via the tradesmen of the village and the servants whom we had brought along.

There *had* been a Mrs. Moore. . . . Yes, a nice lady. . . . But that was more than a couple of years ago. . . . Nobody liked Mr. Ferdinand Moore. . . . And then—something happened; nobody was quite clear about it. . . . They had gone away, he and she—or was it that he had gone first and she had followed? Or the other way round? Well, anyhow, he had come back again alone, looking—*queer*.

"And that's how my uncle remembers it, though he's not grocer here any more, but moved to our other branch at Lyme. But Mr. Moore was always on about his wife coming back, expecting her at any moment, having her room cleared out for her, making excuses till . . . What was one to think? Yes, indeed, he had once said that Mrs. Moore had been with him for the last fortnight and only just gone away again. . . . And how was that, if you please, when none of the neighbours nor villagers had noticed her comings and goings none of that time? Surprised, he seemed to be, and nobody quite knew—nobody liked to say—but there was ugly talk drifting about! In fact——"

In fact, the village believed, like Katherine, that Mrs.

Moore had been murdered by Mr. Moore, buried probably in the garden on a moonless night, and was still to be seen by them as had eyes to see. And thank goodness, it was others as had to live in the house !

Our servants were not superhuman, and it was natural that they should catch infection from the *macabre* atmosphere surrounding "Quiet Corner."

They began to dither. Poor old Mrs. Lane was, of course, utterly miserable. My father-in-law and I tried our best to hearten up things by a scoffing male attitude towards ghosts and hauntings, but I confess quite simply that I was sweating cold every time a board creaked. And Alison was always snatching at my hand or rubbing against my arm, and she was not by nature a clinging creature.

Finally, one night, Kathleen screamed and rushed in to us with some crazy, incoherent description of the ghost she had actually seen. . . . Yes, it must have been Mrs. Moore, standing white and silent in front of the linen-cupboard, which was in Kathleen's room. No, not moving. "She—it—had its back to me. The door swung open, and—oh, Alison. . . ." Kathleen collapsed into gasping sobs. "C-c-counting the towels !" she stammered. "I saw her. Let's go ! Let's go ! It was awful ! Ghastly ! Let's go to-morrow !"

"Counting the towels" was funny, but Kathleen's frenzy was not in the least humorous, and nothing in the world would induce her to be reticent about her experience the next morning. Mrs. Lane vowed she would not stop another night in the house, and so we all packed up and went away, and took refuge at a pleasant, rowdy hotel at Ilfracombe, leaving "Quiet Corner" to the dead wife of Ferdinand Moore.

Eight years ago. Much had happened to all of us since then. No wonder I had forgotten. And now I read Ferdinand Moore's letter :

DEAR SIR,

You will be sorry to hear that my husband has been dead now for over three years. I do not recognise your name, so I expect that you were a friend of his during the time after I left him and went to live at Bristol, where I started an industry for reviving old forms of needlework pictures. I went back to live at "Quiet Corner" directly after poor Ferdinand died. Your letter was forwarded to me from Chesham, where my husband had friends. If there is anything more I could let you know, please tell me.

Yours sincerely,

F. CARLYON MOORE.

I meditated a while. Then I called Alison and told her about it. And we both rocked with laughter. Seen from this distance, the inconvenience forgotten, it was rather funny to have been scared away from a perfectly good holiday by the ghost of a lady who, all the while, had been successfully running an industry for old needlework in Bristol.

Kathleen must have been distinctly overwrought that night.

"But what I still can't understand, Alison, is the insane behaviour of the man himself. Why did the fellow keep on and on pretending that his wife was there, or nearly there, and with him all the time? Of course everyone was bound to suspect him!"

Alison smiled—rather oddly, I thought. "I understand the late Mr. Moore perfectly now," she mused. "Though he certainly was rather a freak."

"Oh, you understand him perfectly, do you?"

"Brian, dear, would you like people to say about you that you were . . . leavable? Nothing wrong with you, but just somehow your wife went away because she didn't want to stop?"

"Better, surely, than for people to say I was a murderer."

"Ferdinand Moore didn't think so. He was a vain man."



STORM JAMESON

*Murder*



## MURDER

NO one can have regretted the murder of J. Blaber. He was not the sort of man one regrets. He was rich, dirty and illiterate. He was very rich—how rich no one knew until his sudden end, when the sum of fifty-nine thousand pounds was discovered in the bread pannikin. The rest, a trifle of thirty thousand, was in the bank. This money had all been made out of pigs. He did not keep them; he bought and sold them. He also bought and sold old horses.

He lived in a shabby, insanitary, tumble-down cottage of two rooms at the very gate of Sir Thomas Severn's drive, and when the Income Tax collector called on him with a request for six hundred pounds he produced the amount, in notes, from his pocket, and threw it sulkily on the table. He objected strongly to paying away money for which he could see no return. When it was represented to him that he was, in fact, supporting the British Empire, he showed a deplorable indifference to his privileges. And he could not sign his name.

In addition, he was the most squalid object in Dorset. He had never been washed since his second birthday, when his mother gave up her perfunctory attempts on him. The windows of his cottage were stuffed with old rags. The outside was unspeakably filthy and decayed. Taken together, he and his cottage ruined the entrance to Sir Thomas Severn's majestic house. And there was no way of getting rid of him.

He owned the land on which his wretched hovel stood. The hovel had leaned close to the side wall of the lodge since the lodge was built—two hundred years ago. The original owner of Severn Hall had not objected, nor had any of his descendants, until it came into the possession of a very distant Severn, to whom Blaber and his hovel were sheerly maddening.

Sir Thomas was a bachelor, of wide and exquisite culture. He collected glass and Dutch pictures. Under the warmth of his taste and his income the Hall and the gardens flowered into an unfamiliar loveliness. Only Blaber's hovel marred the pattern.

Sir Thomas tried persuasion, threats, money. Blaber did not understand the first, and the threats produced a contemptuous chuckle. As for money—well, what could money mean to a man who kept notes in the bread pannikin? He didn't want money. He wanted his two warm, dirty, familiar rooms.

Sir Thomas took to driving through his gates with his face averted. If, drawn by a dreadful fascination, he glanced to the right he was almost sure to see the grotesque, leering face of J. Blaber watching him with an air of furtive amusement. It was almost too much for a sensitive-minded man. Sir Thomas began to think of going abroad.

So that—though no doubt he was shocked and startled—he was not very sorry to hear that J. Blaber had been found dead in the back room of his cottage, shot through the heart with his own gun. No one was very sorry. J. Blaber had no friends. For a long time the police could not find that he had any relatives.

In the meantime inquiries were begun into the manner of his death. It was at first assumed that he had shot himself—perhaps by accident—perhaps because he had suddenly seen himself. But the local doctor, after long cogitations

over the body, walking, crawling and snuffing round it in a professionally unpleasant way, gave it as his opinion at the inquest that the wound had not been self-inflicted.

So someone had murdered Blaber. As soon as the news spread he ceased to be the object of mild speculation and became the centre of a positive maelstrom of talk, blues, mystery and terror. They said there was a new Ripper abroad. They said that the Vicar had been very queer in his manner ever since, at Easter, he was suddenly confronted by Miss Edith Snow in magenta satin and kid boots. They said that Miss Snow herself wasn't herself when she saw a man—and J. Blaber was a man, after all. The village let itself go for the first time since Mrs. Ffoliott ran off with the jockey, leaving a note between her husband's teeth in the bathroom.

A detective came down to assist the local police. He put up at the village inn, where the only other guest was a young Mr. Eliot, known to be courting Miss Catherine Severn, Sir Thomas's niece. Everything else about him was equally well known. He was poor, not liked by Sir Thomas, and he worked in the Foreign Office. This last implied that he was some sort of alien himself, probably a spy. The fact that he had sleek black hair, an olive skin and a languid voice made the last practically certain.

Before the detective had been in the village an hour five persons had come to him independently to say that on the morning of J. Blaber's death they had seen Mr. Eliot walking away from the cottage into the plantation behind. He had seemed vexed or excited, waving his arms and muttering; sobbing, one woman said.

The detective—his name was Orme, and he had been educated at Rugby and Baliol—was not unused to the mania of suspicion which hangs like a cloud of flies over most

villages. But, in spite of himself, he was impressed by the unanimity of the testimony. Then, when he caught his first glimpse of Michael Eliot, disappearing down a shadowy passage in the inn, he recognised him as a man whom he had known a little and disliked a great deal at Oxford. In those days Eliot had been a languid, sinuous young gentleman, given to black cloaks and lilies. He burnt incense in his rooms and wrote poetry in French.

It was all very youthful and decadent and usual, and Orme admitted to himself that the real reason why he disliked Michael Eliot was probably that Eliot—by whom at first sight he had been unwillingly impressed—had seemed bored by him and failed to recognise him when they next met. Reminded, he had said absently: "Of course, you're the man who—ah—reads Galsworthy. *Too* refreshing." Affected ass! After all these years, Orme felt a quiver of wounded vanity and annoyance.

He left the inn and walked to Blaber's cottage. The constable on guard told him that interest in the scene of the murder was dying down. No one had been near the place for an hour, except that Mr. Eliot, who had walked straight past and rushed into the plantation at the back.

The detective could not imagine Eliot rushing anywhere. He went into the cottage again and looked round at the squalid, disorderly scene. The murderer, whoever he was, had not found the money in the bread pannikin, but he had evidently looked for it. The mattress was off the bed, the few drawers had been opened and their contents emptied on the floor—even the rags of carpet had been torn up.

Orme had just left the cottage and was walking back towards the village when footsteps behind him caused him to glance over his shoulder. Michael Eliot, swinging his arms and humming, approached quickly. As he passed he slackened his pace, stared, and finally smiled.

"Hullo, Orme," he said gently, "still reading our modern masters?"

Orme swallowed his irritation.

"No," he said.

"What *are* you doing here?"

"Looking for a murderer," Orme said.

Eliot regarded him first with surprise and then with mild amusement. "You're not the Flying Squad, are you?" When Orme had explained he broke into spontaneous laughter. "Splendid!" he cried. "My dear Orme! I always *knew* you had an original mind. Let's write novels together. You supply the crude material and I'll add the—er—literary merit. We shall make a fortune."

Orme, fortunately, had a sense of humour. He grinned amiably and the two walked on together to the inn, where Eliot invited him up to his room for a drink.

"You'd better come to mine," Orme said. "I want to ask you a few questions."

Eliot's eyebrows flew up. Something of his old languor returned to him as he followed the detective upstairs. He sank gingerly into a chair and looked round the room.

"The inconceivable squalor of the uninstructed mind," he said, nodding at a picture on the wall.

Orme rather liked the picture; it was a print of Millais', negligible, perhaps, but not vicious. "I'm surprised you stay here," he said swiftly.

"I stay here because I have not yet succeeded in getting myself invited to the Hall," Eliot said.

"Do you often stay here?"

"Whenever I get leave."

"You—like the country, I suppose."

Eliot settled into his chair. "Do let's understand each other," he murmured. "Am I being examined?"

Orme hesitated. After all, he thought, the man's a

gentleman. He took a chance. "The truth is, my dear Eliot, that you were seen by no fewer than five persons in the village coming away from Blaber's cottage the morning he was shot. It is absurd, of course, but sooner or later I have got to ask you what you were doing there."

"Minding my own business," Eliot said quickly.

"That's no good," Orme said.

Eliot smiled charmingly. "Of course it isn't. Do forgive me, I ought to know better. But I'm so new to crime—serious crime—and you're rather flustering me." He did not look in the least flustered. "I dare say these charming people, who know everything, have told you that I come down here to see Miss Severn. It's true. We'd like to get married, but Sir Thomas—who could do everything for us—won't do a damned thing. He won't even see me."

"Why not?"

"Like so many of these well-to-do Puritans, my dear Orme, he seemed to regard the fact of having no money as a kind of moral defect—a punishment for sin, I suppose. I have no money. Therefore I am immoral. Miss Severn, fortunately, is not—to the same degree—a Puritan. On the morning when the pig-dealer died—and I assure you that if you had seen him alive you would not be taking all this trouble about his fortunate decease——"

"I've seen him dead," Orme said grimly.

Eliot shuddered. "Forgive me for recalling him to you. As I was saying—that morning I did what I've done every morning since I've been here. I walked past Blaber's cottage, through the plantation at the back, and along under the wall of Sir Thomas's park to a door that opens out from one of his orchards. There I waited for Miss Severn to come if she could. That morning she did come. We were together for some time, her uncle being luckily shut up in his room, she told me, with an attack of gout. The only thing, my



dear Orme, that reconciles me to the thought of Severn's being so revoltingly well-off is that it has given him severe gout. Miss Severn and I spent the morning and part of the afternoon together. I went back to the inn for tea."

"I see," Orme said.

"Forgive me," Eliot corrected him gently, "but I don't think that you do—quite. I don't mind telling you all this. But it would be very embarrassing—not to me, but to Miss Severn—if I had to explain it in public."

"Oh, quite," Orme said hastily. He resented the way in which Eliot always contrived to make him appear an obtuse, blundering creature. "I don't think that will be necessary."

"Let's hope not," Eliot murmured. He stood up, with his engaging smile. "May I go now? Or is the third degree still to come?"

"Don't be an ass," Orme said. He felt sure that Eliot was telling the truth. At the same time, that curious nagging intuition he had, which sometimes allowed him to feel farther into another person's mind than he could see, warned him that Eliot was keeping a great deal back. There was an odd vibration in his voice—wholly unconscious—the reflection of something in his mind, something exciting which he had not allowed to appear on the surface.

"One woman who saw you go towards the plantation says you were sobbing. Another says you seemed annoyed."

"I *was* annoyed. I had hiccoughs," Eliot said simply. "I always get them when I'm excited. It's the great tragedy of my life. I got them the first time I saw Catherine—Miss Severn—alone. And again when I went with her to see her uncle for the first and only time. I dare say that's really why he mistrusts me. You can't blame him too much, can you? You—being a man of the world, my dear Orme—

will realise what it means to me to have this ghastly infliction. It has made me what I am, a haunted man."

Orme looked at him as he stood there, exquisitely although simply dressed, one white hand smoothing his dark, sleek hair, and felt that the epithet was purely conventional.

The next day was a perfect July day. He walked past Blaber's cottage, into the plantation, and followed the path under the wall until he came to the door. He was looking at it when two persons approached it from the other direction. Michael Eliot and a young woman. Miss Severn, of course.

Orme looked at her curiously. She was not beautiful, but she was charming, and she had a beautiful voice. He thought she was too good for Eliot.

Eliot introduced him to her with a sardonic, but not unfriendly air. "This is Orme. You must be careful what you say because he's looking for evidence against me."

"Don't be absurd. Isn't he absurd, Mr. Orme?"

"Very," Orme said.

"Last night," Eliot said dreamily, "I told him the darkest secret of my life and he never so much as blinked. So don't think because he looks as he does that he's not thinking. He's weighing every word you say and finding it wanting."

Orme was annoyed by this. He did not want to appear before Miss Severn in the role of obtuse, unintelligent detective. He said something rather incisive. Miss Severn seemed to know that he was hurt. She turned to her lover with a sweet and reproachful smile.

"Do you think we might ask Mr. Orme to lunch?"

"Why not? Even sleuths sometimes eat and sleep."

"I wish you wouldn't keep harping on my profession," Orme said testily. "It's a far more respectable profession than yours. I never landed the country in a European war, and I don't go about thinking myself a superior being on the

strength of having to attend vulgarly expensive dinners for what I believe you call potentates."

"No," Eliot protested languidly. "Not in my department. We call everyone below the rank of emperor by his nickname. But that doesn't make us superior. What gives us this air of conscious merit—pathetic if you like—is that we are the last bulwark against the roaring sea of democracy. We may be trivial, our occupations may be absurd, repetitive and mysterious—but we are *not* vulgar. Using the word in its proper sense, as meaning of or pertaining to the people. We do not pertain to the people. When that is no longer true the last link will have snapped between the dreadful, crushing vulgarity of the modern world and the leisurely, elegant, lovely past. In those days I shall have resigned and be dragging out a squalid middle-age in Tunbridge Wells."

"Darling," Catherine Severn said, "light the spirit lamp." She had produced a picnic basket and a primus from just inside the door in the wall, and was spreading the things on the grass. "There's quite enough for you," she said prettily to Orme. "We always have lunch like this if my uncle is ill. Cook gives it to me."

"Is this what you were doing the day Blaber was shot?" Orme asked thoughtlessly.

Eliot pointed a long finger at him. "What did I tell you? You must be careful, Cat. An unguarded word and I shall be on my way to Dorchester gaol."

Catherine laughed. And again, in laugh and her glance at Eliot, Orme caught that quiver of excitement or apprehension. She turned to Orme. "This lunch is by way of consolation," she said. "We'd hoped to be able to speak to my uncle again to-day. He was quite cheerful when he thought he'd soon get rid of poor Blaber's cottage—but the

police haven't traced his relatives yet, and it looks as though everything might drag on indefinitely. He's very irritable again to-day."

"I'll let you know the moment we discover anyone," Orme offered.

He liked her very much. Afterwards, as he was walking back to the inn, he wondered what on earth she saw in Eliot, with his tart mind and drawling, provocative voice. He found a message waiting for him to say that a man answering to the description he had circulated of Eliot had taken the noon train at the junction on the morning of Blaber's death. He hired the car belonging to the butcher and drove into the junction. Careful questioning of the porter who had seen the man left no doubt in his mind that it was Eliot. So there had been no picnic under the wall of the park that day.

"Was he alone?" he asked suddenly.

"Yes."

"Where did he go?"

"Oi dunno where he went tu," the porter said craftily. "His ticket might have took 'ee to Dorchester, if so be he went there."

On the way to Dorchester Orme tried to keep his mind to the impossibility of Eliot's having committed so sordid and apparently meaningless a murder. Yet was it so meaningless? Eliot needed money. Everyone knew that Blaber kept large sums of money in his cottage. Eliot would have been told about the income-tax man—it was a village joke. He might have gone into the cottage on an impulse to steal, been surprised by Blaber, and shot him to stifle the scandal. Fantastic! And yet—Orme was coming to believe that the more fantastic a story seemed the more likely it was to be strictly true. Murder itself, done by a civilised man, was fantastic—like meeting a naked savage in Bond Street. He remembered suddenly that on that evening at Oxford, when

Eliot had behaved so insufferably, he had also talked a great deal about the poetic charms of murder.

To be truly poetic, of course, it had to be completely useless and disinterested—an experiment in the *macabre*, undertaken in the spirit of æsthetic research. At the time it had seemed just the sort of blague one would expect from Eliot. Now——

He took himself firmly in hand. He was doing the one thing he must never do—form a theory and try to fit the facts to it, instead of letting the theory evolve naturally from the facts. He decided to think of Catherine Severn.

It struck him that she had never answered his idle question as to whether there had been a picnic on the day of Blaber's death. Could she—was it possible that she was afraid for Eliot?

At Dorchester he picked up the man who had driven Eliot from the station. He had driven him to a register office. No, he had not waited. Orme drove there. Under the appropriate date he found the record of a marriage between Michael Nicholls Eliot and Catherine Severn.

As he came out, feeling very flat, the only thought that occurred to him was: "How silly to have hiccoughs because you are going to be married."

That finished that. A man doesn't, unless he is insane, stop to commit a murder on his way to be married. Orme saw Eliot hurrying through the plantation and along the path, struggling desperately with the spasms, meeting his beloved, giving her—between gasps—final instructions and then hurrying on to the junction. By the time he got there he was doubtless cured. *She* must have gone into Dorchester by the bus.

Orme hoped that the hiccoughs had returned during the ceremony.

A fortnight later he was recalled. He had made no discoveries about the murder. Indeed, he had come to the conclusion that there had never been a murder. The doctor, questioned again severely, admitted that it was just possible that Blaber could have shot himself. He stuck to it that he did not believe the pig-dealer had done any such thing. Privately, Orme thought him an opinionated fool. He was in a thoroughly bad temper. He had wasted three weeks, been made to look a complete fool, all for a revolting old wretch who had died a natural and certainly merited death. Angrily he flung his things into his suitcase and prepared to leave the place where he had been so humiliated.

He was just going when they sent to tell him that J. Blaber's heir had been discovered at Falmouth. A nephew, who said that so far as he knew he was the dead man's only relative. Orme went back to the inn and scribbled a note to Catherine Severn.

She was in the park when it came, with Michael Eliot, but one of her many allies—this one was the gardener's son—brought it out to her. She decided that Michael must take the news to Sir Thomas himself as if he had just learned it in the village. In the state of pleasurable excitement that would follow the announcement Sir Thomas would consent to anything, even to the marriage of his only niece with a penniless Foreign Office clerk.

"I'm not quite penniless, darling," Eliot protested.

"No. But you only have enough to buy those very suede gloves you wear in London and nothing over to buy me hats and frocks, not to speak of all the other things your wife will need if she is even to be noticed in the same room with yourself. Don't you want people to notice me?"

"No," said Eliot. "Only me. I'm glad the sleuth has gone. He was always looking at you."

"I thought him rather a nice man," Catherine said.

"He's a fool."

They walked back to the Hall, and Eliot took the news to Sir Thomas in his library. Sir Thomas was delighted. His fine, sensitive face softened as he listened.

"A nephew, you said?"

"Yes, sir."

"Young, I daresay?"

"I suppose he will be," Eliot murmured.

"He won't want to stay here any longer than he can help," Sir Thomas said meditatively. "All that money. He'll want to be spending some of it at once. I shall get Nicholson to make him an offer. I shan't appear in the matter myself. There's no reason why I should pay more for the wretched place than I need. If he thinks some villager is buying it——" He turned to his niece. "You're not saying anything, Cat."

"I was thinking how nice it would be if you and I and Michael were always friendly and happy together like this," Catherine said wistfully.

Sir Thomas looked surprised. "Well——"

"Darling, I *can't* not tell you," Catherine cried. She jumped up and ran towards him with a carefully calculated air of love and shyness. "I'm so happy. And you're the only person in the world I want to know about it. Michael and I are married. We were married a fortnight ago. The very day that poor man was shot."

"The very day," Sir Thomas began.

"I must have walked past the cottage at the very moment," Eliot interrupted in a gentle voice.

Sir Thomas Severn's face had darkened. It cleared again suddenly. He smiled at his niece. "What am I to say?" he asked.

"Say you love me just a little," Catherine murmured.

During the following week Sir Thomas said more than that. He made a settlement on the young couple which was generous rather than merely adequate. He gave Eliot two boxes of his special cigars and a great deal of advice, both of which the young man accepted with a perfect courtesy. Then he sent them off in the second car to spend the last week of Eliot's leave honeymooning in London.

The day they left was the day J. Blaber's nephew and heir arrived in the village. After dinner Sir Thomas strolled through the warm scented dusk to the plantation behind Blaber's cottage. He went by a way known only to himself. When he reached it he saw a young man with red hair and large red hands superintending the removal to the cottage from a cart of some pieces of dilapidated furniture. Sir Thomas watched him for a few moments, with a chill slowly freezing his heart. The young man was very like the late unlamented Blaber, except that he was even more unpleasant to look at. And he was young, and would live for years, whereas the pig-dealer had been elderly.

At last Sir Thomas spoke. "You must be Mr. Blaber's nephew," he said in a quiet voice.

"That's me," the young man said. He was evidently labouring under an intense though inarticulate excitement.

"I should have thought you'd want to sell the place."

"Sell it? Me? I should — well think not. Why, ever since I was a kid I've had a mind to it." His voice cracked in triumph. "I shall live 'ere—and live 'ere—and live 'ere. All my life."

Sir Thomas went slowly back. The night scents of his garden rose round him. The white front of his house glimmered ghostly against the wine-dark sky. "I've committed a perfectly useless murder," he said to himself gently.

It had not, however, been useless. Only useless to Sir Thomas, who had had all the trouble.



HENRY PETERSON

*Lum Lo's Idol*



## LUM LO'S IDOL

THE Yang-tze flood wiped out the whole family, except Lum Lo, and left the boy of eighteen with just the pair of blue cotton trousers he stood up in.

For three weeks he fought starvation on bark and slugs. He was alive when relief came.

Government officials tramped over the oozy land, and he found himself the owner of seven paddy fields that could yield not a grain of rice for a year.

No grant came the way of the boy appealing with empty hands in just a pair of blue cotton trousers.

For many weary days the emaciated youth dug under the old home that no longer existed. His father had buried the family fortune there—perhaps a miserable five hundred dollars, wrung in half a lifetime from the bitter hand-to-mouth struggle. He never found them, for the flood had carried away the top soil as well as everything that had stood on it.

So did Lum Lo become the owner of seven paddy fields. And to start cultivation he was forced to go to town to borrow from a pawnbroker. And the bare minimum he borrowed would take three good years to pay back. If he had not been so timid and felt under so great an obligation to the pawnbroker he would have been able to pay back after two good years, for the pawnbroker would not have charged him a 100 per cent interest.

Fate relented, and gave Lum Lo three good years. After

paying off the capital and interest he could put aside a few dollars and buy everything for the next season's sowing.

Lum Lo was now twenty-one, and with the hope of better times, other thoughts came to him. Utterly alone in the world he thought of a wife—to share his labours, to comfort him and to bear him sons. Without a son the long line of ancestor-worship would die with him. The spirits of his sacred ancestors would wander disconsolate in space, cut off from the sphere where they had been part of the Visible Universe.

Two good years would do it, only two good years. But Lum Lo was superstitious, even more so than his kind after the horrors of the flood had shown him that only the will of Heaven mattered, that terrible will carried out by the myriad spirits peopling the air. Three good years had already been his lot. Now he wanted another two. It was making a proud demand of Heaven.

His neighbour gave him advice. This neighbour of thirty had not only a wife, but three sons and two daughters.

"I was just as poor as you," said the neighbour, "so how did I get a wife? Come with me."

He took Lum Lo to a tiny hutch at the back of the small farmhouse.

"That was how I got a wife," he said, "by praying to the right god."

Lum Lo stared at a wooden idol some three feet high, gaudily painted in blue and red, standing scowling with legs apart in a fighting attitude. Never had he seen anything so menacing, and he fell on his knees and kowtowed to it. The hot sweat lay chill on the body of the timid and superstitious young farmer, and he remained on his knees as though unable to get up.

"You must buy oil for a wick lamp. The flame must never go out. On the first day of every new moon you must burn joss-sticks, at least twenty sticks. And every two months you give the god wine and roast pork. Of course, an extra

lot on New Year's Day, and at the Spring and Autumn Festivals.

"But this will cost many cash," Lum Lo said, with his heart sunk into his bowels.

"I was as poor as you. I made those sacrifices. That was how I got a wife. How can you expect a god to help you if you give him nothing? And I know what this god likes."

Lum Lo bent his forehead to the ground and mumbled a prayer before he dared ask the question in his mind.

"O Elder Brother, where can I buy a god like this one?"

"I will take you to the shop the next time we go to market. But have you four dollars?"

Lum Lo nodded slowly, with his heart sunk still further into his bowels. He had five dollars buried deep.

The young farmer did more than just buy the ferocious idol and its immediate requirements. He built a hutch for it twice as big as his neighbour's. That was the least he could do to put the god in a good humour, the least he could do to get the wife he wanted so much.

So Lum Lo worked harder than ever to squeeze the last grain of rice out of his seven fields, so as to be able to put a little aside after appeasing a god with such expensive tastes.

As he toiled from dawn till dusk there were moments when his timid soul shuddered at the gamble he was taking. Three times now he had bought the wine and roast pork. The next morning they had gone. He had not so far mentioned the phenomenon to his neighbour. A phenomenon it was indeed to him. No stranger ever passed this out-of-the-way pocket of his land.

Moreover, had not the neighbour told him that no human being could put foot into another man's private sanctuary without being struck dead by the god within? Yet curiosity had stirred in him—to see how a god drank wine and ate roast pork. Did he dare creep round the next time and see? For

many days Lum Lo thought it over. Then caution got the better of him, and he told his neighbour.

"Ah! my friend," the neighbour said, "things are going well. The god is pleased with your sacrifices. He only touches the offerings when he is pleased. You are luckier than I was. It was a full year before the god drank the wine and ate the roast pork. You will have a wife before you know where you are. But you must hurry things. From now on get the best wine and the best roast pork."

Lum Lo did as he was told, for the need of a wife was growing stronger in him. There were nights as the moon sailed serenely in the heavens softly caressing river, hills and trees when the tired peasant body knew only broken sleep.

Yet as he toiled on month after month, sacrificing good immediate cash for a future reward, his practical nature would revolt. His rationalistic, his utilitarian Chinese soul was hurt in these moments of doubt. But the very nearness of the ferocious god would tip the balance back on the side of faith, which was so closely allied to fear in the simple peasant. He still trembled every time he went into the hutch every four days to fill the wick lamp.

He was now nearing the end of the first season, and the healthy green tufts of rice soothed his divided soul. When the crop was gathered and sold, he bought an extra lot of roast pork, and did not forget to present his kind neighbour with some.

Another such year, and he would have a wife.

But a blight came the next season, and Lum Lo had to dig up sixteen of the twenty dollars he had buried to prepare the fields for the following year. Lum Lo now went about his toil resentfully, and one day his neighbour scolded him.

"You have been mean to the god. I got mine from the same shop, and see what he did for me. Give him more pork and wine, and you will surely have a wife before you know where you are."

Month after month, as Lum Lo toiled from dawn till dusk, the battle went on in him. Only the unconquerable determination of the Chinese peasant kept him going. His seven fields were tiered up a hill, one above the other. Water had to be carried up six hundred feet to the top one, bucket after bucket, all day long, week after week. By an ingenious damming system on each level, the water flowed down at the right rate to irrigate each field. It was labour that even a beast of burden might have jibbed at, but Lum Lo was fortified by the will bred of strong human desires.

Lum Lo now stayed longer in the hutch every time he brought the wine and roast pork, praying longer and more fervently. And something else had stirred in the earthly soul. In a vague way he felt that if the god only knew how urgent was his desire, he would help more quickly. So Lum Lo stayed on these days after presenting the offering, and talked to the god, haltingly, with goose flesh on his skin, yet stubbornly. His sense of justice—that inevitable sense of justice in a Chinese—had also been roused. "The god was taking up the middle of the road, when he, the poor farmer, was carrying the load." Surely, being a god, he knew the terrible sacrifices his poor suppliant was making? As the months went by, Lum Lo began to lose some of his fear of the idol, through familiarity, but, still more, through the sense of injustice that was coming upon him.

Now suddenly everything went right. The rain and the sun came at the proper times, and destructive insects seemed to have disappeared from the face of the earth. With half the labour, Lum Lo reaped twice the crop. And the labour of his free hours also bore abundant fruit. His cabbages were fat, green and luscious, and there were now a hundred chickens before the house, whereas even his mother had never owned half so many.

Without a family to feed, Lum Lo dug sixty dollars into

the good earth after laying in everything for the next season's growing. That was a good idol, after all, a just god. Never having refused the offerings, he had given proper return.

As Lum Lo sowed the next spring, his fingers sometimes trembled. One more season, even a moderate season, would see him no longer alone.

The sun shone brightly that spring, and it went on shining. Summer came, and the sun still shone. A month before the harvest, the fields were parched. All day and far into the night Lum Lo drew water from the river that had become a trickle and carried it up the six hundred feet. Two buckets at a time, slung across his shoulders. What were buckets for seven fields in a drought? But it was better to do this than to sit down and do nothing. Day after day, and far into the night, Lum Lo watered his fields with the buckets. Even his horn-covered feet had cracked. His back ached so that cries were wrung from him every time he stumbled in the dark, but he toiled on. He toiled on though twice he had fallen in a dizzy faint and spilled the precious water where no rice was struggling to keep alive. The more he ached the more frantic became his battle with the withering sun.

Several times a day he examined the sickly yellow tufts. Four more days he gave the crop. Still no sign of rain. That day was the first of the month, that day the wine and roast pork were due the god. Lum Lo fingered a silver dollar as he looked up at his dying fields. It would take three hours to get the offerings on his cracked and swollen feet. How many buckets could he carry in three hours? Perhaps eight, perhaps ten.

He set off for the village. How foolish even to have hesitated. For two years he had not missed a single sacrifice. How foolish to stop now when he was most in need. But as he limped on, bruised in body and spirit, freed for a while from the sight of his gaping fields, the old battle broke out afresh in him.



But his peasant stubbornness won, and he brought the pork and wine.

When he had put up the offerings he stood looking at the god. Rebelliously. Forgetting that he had still to get firewood for that night's supper, although the chopper was held in his hand.

Suddenly a wail floated over his parched fields. Then Lum Lo beat his chest. He had added up all the money he had spent on the idol. He had done that before, more than once, but the figure had never taken on such meaning. Again he beat his chest. The great, the mad, sum could start him afresh next year even if the present crop was totally destroyed.

Lum Lo wailed again like an animal in pain, wounded to the very depths of his peasant soul.

He looked out at the cruel sky, his eyes glowing like lamps. He looked at the setting sun, the shameless sun, and he cursed it. Then he laughed, and the laugh was more uncanny than the wail. A god, indeed! A god, indeed! Giving promises just to rob a poor farmer! Worse than just a useless god, the idol was a cheat and a thief! He would settle accounts with one even more heartless than the soldiers!

"Liar!" He spat at the idol. "Cheat!" He spat again. "Thief!" He spat yet again. "Now strike me dead if you are a god. Go on, strike me dead! I defy you! Go on! I am waiting. You can do nothing. But I can!"

With that, Lum Lo sprang at the idol and lifted the chopper in his hand. The very first blow split his head open. He rent it in two with the next. Seized with the mania of destruction, Lum Lo hacked at the image until the pieces flew in all directions.

"Take that! Take that, you cheat, you thief! and that!"

He stood up and surveyed what he had done, wiping the sweat from his eyes. He put up his head and laughed, more uncannily than he had wailed.

"And once I was afraid of you! Afraid of you! I tell you what I'll do with you. I want firewood for my supper to-night. You'll be my firewood! You'll boil my rice for me!"

Spitting at the pieces, he swept them together into a heap with his feet. Then he tied them into a bundle with his girdle.

"Thirty-two dollars! Firewood! Firewood!" Hysterically he laughed as he swung the demolished god on to his shoulder.

As he straightened himself, the horror of his sacrilege rushed upon the superstitious peasant. The sun had set, and the swift Eastern dusk made the dark hutch seem darker. The straw walls, touched by the swirling breeze, took on strange shapes. He felt the evil spirits peopling the air brushing against his cold skin. Blood-curdling tales, part of the very soil of China, of retribution by angered gods came back to him.

All his primitive peasant terror of the supernatural had seized Lum Lo. Any instant he expected the bundle on his shoulder to come to life and strike him dead.

He heard a pitter-pattering on the iron ground outside.

Raindrops!

A sign from the god! He had been too hasty! His ingratitude made revenge doubly certain!

Then he heard footsteps approaching.

No one ever passed his way, not even his neighbour. But the unseen footsteps were coming nearer and nearer, making for the front entrance.

Lum Lo wanted to run out and see, but he could not move. Step by step the unseen feet came on, nearer, nearer still. They were almost on him.

With a desperate effort Lum Lo freed his petrified limbs and tip-toed out of the back entrance, still holding bundle and chopper.

The footsteps went into the hutch.

He heard a gasp. Then there was a low chuckle.

Was it possible? Then unmistakably he heard the wine being poured into a bottle.

Lum Lo put his head into the hutch. The truth dawned on him. He gave a howl of rage and rushed in. The thief sprang back. The chopper split open the neighbour's head.

One day in the winter digging, Lum Lo's three sons brought back a bulging sack from the top field.

"Father, a skeleton! Look at the skull!" They tipped out the white bones and a broken skull.

Their father and mother looked curiously at each other.

Lum Lo threw up his head and laughed. "They are the bones and skull of a god. Put them under the rice pot. We need ash for the fields."

"The bones of a god?"

"An evil god," their mother replied. "He tried to stop you all from coming into the world."

Lum Lo's sons spat on the bones and threw them joyously into the fire.



MARCEL AYMÉ

*The Dwarf*



## THE DWARF

WHEN he was thirty-five the dwarf of Barnumbill's Circus began to grow. Scientists were very annoyed, for once and for all they had fixed twenty-five as the age when growth stops. That is why they tried to hush up the affair.

Barnumbill's Circus was on the last laps of a tour that would land it, after a few more stop-overs, in the Big City. At the little town where they had pitched their tents they gave one matinee and two evening performances at which the dwarf did his act. He entered the ring dressed like a dandy, hand-in-hand with the Serpent Man, whom he affected not to see at one glance, so tall he was. And the public laughed because the one was so tall and the other was so tiny. The Serpent Man walked along with great strides worth six or seven of the little steps of the dwarf, and when he came to the middle of the ring he said with a cavernous voice :

"I'm getting tired."

The laughter of the audience died down to allow the dwarf to answer with a piping, girlish voice :

"Good, Mr. Stringbean, I'm glad you're tired!"

And that made the audience laugh still harder.

From time to time the dwarf cast a glance at the compact crowd, whose last rows were lost in the shadows. The laughter and the stares did not bother him ; he felt neither pain nor pleasure. Never at the instant of going before the public did he experience that slight distress which caught at the throats of the other artists. The effort of the clown Koko, that tension

of the heart and mind to get hold of the public, was useless to him. Even as it was enough for Jumbo to be elephant, so it was enough for him to be dwarf, and he had no need to love the public.

At the end of his act he left the ring, running, and the Serpent Man who held his hand lifted him up off the ground so funnily that loud applause rang out. Then the Ringmaster wrapped a cloak about him and took him to Mr. Barnumbill, who gave him one candy or two, depending on whether he was satisfied with his work.

Then he went to where Miss Germina, the Bareback Rider, was waiting her turn to go on. Her legs sheathed in pink tights, her body held in by a black velvet bodice, she sat very stiffly on her stool, watchful not to ruffle her fluffy ballet-skirt and her pink chiffon neck ruffle.

Taking the dwarf on her knee she kissed his forehead and stroked his hair, speaking gently to him. About her there were always men saying quite mysterious things to her. For a long time the dwarf had been used to these occasional remarks, and he could have repeated them with a smile and a decent look, but their meaning remained an irritating enigma for him.

One evening Koko was there alone with them, and in his befloured face his eyes shone with a strange light. Seeing he was about to speak the dwarf thought to get in his word first; he murmured to the Bareback Rider that he was losing his sleep because of an adorable lady with marvellously fair hair, her waist caught in a pink fluffy skirt, which made her look like a butterfly in the morning. She had burst out laughing and the clown had left, slamming the door behind him, although, to tell the truth, there was no door.

When Miss Germina jumped on her horse he ran to the entrance of the ring and stood beside the keeper of the door. Children in the audience pointed him out, laughing, and saying:



"It's the dwarf!" He looked at them distrustfully, and when he was sure that their parents were not looking he amused himself making frightening faces at them. In the ring the Bareback Rider galloped, her leaps multiplying the chiffony folds of her pink skirt. Dazzled by the glaring lights and the fluttering wings of Miss Germina, wearied by the heavy murmur and the breath of life that filled the circus, he felt his eyes blinking and made his way to one of the caravans, where old Mary undressed him and put him to bed.

While they were on the road from that town to another the dwarf awoke towards eight in the morning with a high fever, complaining of a terrific headache. Mary made him a hot drink and asked him if his feet were cold. She discovered with amazement that the dwarf's feet were down at the very bottom of the bed instead of a foot or so away from it. Mary was so frightened that she opened the window and shouted as they sped along:

"My God, the dwarf's growing! STOP! STOP!"

But the noise of the motors drowned her voice; and, besides, everybody was asleep in their caravans. She watched, powerless, the growth of the dwarf, who gave vent to screams of pain and anxiety. Sometimes he questioned Mary with a voice still childish, but already uncertain.

"Mary," he said, "I'm ill, just as though I were going to break in several bits. Just as though all Mr. Barnumbill's horses were working to tear me limb from limb. What's happening, Mary?"

"It's because you're growing, Dwarf. But don't get yourself in an uproar that way. The doctors will find a way to cure you and then you can go on with your act with the Serpent Man."

Towards nine o'clock the dwarf had to lie doubled up in his comfortable truckle-bed; even then he was not comfort-

able. And though Mary kept on making hot drinks he could almost be seen lengthening with the naked eye, and when they arrived at their destination he was already a graceful adolescent. Hurriedly called in, Mr. Barnumbill had first of all a movement of pity, and murmured sympathetically :

“Poor boy ! His career is ruined now. And he started off so well.”

He measured the dwarf, and when he discovered that he had grown taller by twenty-four inches he could not hide his vexation.

“He is really useless,” he said. “What the devil can one do with a kid whose only speciality is to measure five feet ? I’m asking you, Mary. It’s obviously a curious case, but I don’t see how we can make an act out of it. We should have to be able to show it as ‘Before’ and ‘After.’ Ah, if he’d only grown a second head, or an elephant’s trunk, or anything else slightly original I wouldn’t be worried. But, really, I don’t know what to do with this sudden growth. How am I going to replace you this evening, Dwarf ? I’m still calling you Dwarf when I’d be doing better to give you your own name, Peter Smithson.”

“Is my name Peter Smithson ?” asked the heretofore dwarf.

“I’m not very sure. Smithson, or Smithers, if not plain Smith, or even Jones. I have no means of making certain. In any case, I can guarantee you the Christian name of Peter.”

Mr. Barnumbill gave Mary orders not to noise about the occurrence. He feared that the news would cause a little revolution among the artists of his troupe. They agreed to say that the dwarf, very seriously ill, had to remain in bed and not see anyone. Before leaving the caravan, Mr. Barnumbill again measured the patient, who had grown an inch during the conversation.

“I’ll be blowed if he don’t go right along ! If he keeps on

he'll soon be a presentable enough giant—but we can't count too much on that. As he has no clothes to fit him you'd better go and look in my wardrobe for the grey suit with the gooseberry stripes which I had to leave off wearing last year."

At eight o'clock at night Peter realised that his growing crisis was over. He now measured five feet eight inches, and nothing was lacking to what usually goes to make up the pride of a good-looking man. Old Mary did not tire of looking at him, and clasping her hands, she complimented him on his fine moustache and nice collar or beard that added so much distinction to his fair, youthful face. He had broad shoulders, too, and his rounded torso fitted snugly into Mr. Barnumbill's jacket.

Peter was pleased, but soon had other subjects of wonderment. For instance, the things which seemed so heavy to him a while ago—his big picture-book, the storm-lantern, the water-bucket—no longer had any weight in his hands. And he felt within his body and limbs unused strength for which he vainly sought employment in that van where everything was reduced in size.

So it was with all the notions, all the ideas, which but the day before had filled his dwarf's mind and imagination; he now saw that they were no longer sufficient, and always it seemed to him when he was about to speak that he lacked something. Sometimes a wavering intuition made him stray on the wrong road, although he suspected something was wrong. As Old Mary came close to him to arrange his tie he took her hand and uttered phrases that came to his mind, having heard them many times in other circumstances.

"How can you stop me from finding you charming? Your eyes have the deep and tender colour of summer nights; nothing is sweeter than the smile of your stubborn mouth;

all your gestures are like those of a bird in flight. Happy, a thousand times happy, the man who knows how to find the secret path to your heart, but be he accursed if he be not I!"

At the first words Old Mary was a little surprised, then she became used to the idea that one might still address such homages to her. She smiled with a stubborn mouth, fluttered her wing like a bird in flight, and sighed with her hand over her heart:

'Ah, Master Peter, you've gained even more wit than waist, and I don't think that a person with any feeling could resist so many accomplishments. I don't want to be cruel, Master Peter. Besides, it isn't in my make-up. . . .'

But the wooer, without knowing why, let out a roar of laughter, and Mary immediately understood that she had been taken in by his fine words.

She shed a tear and he gave her a few pats on the back in the way he had seen Mr. Barnumbill do when women had a great grief. He noted in his mind that Mary was bucked up right away.

When the show had begun Mr. Barnumbill made a brief appearance in the van, hurried as he always was. He did not recognise Peter, and thought that Old Mary had called in a doctor.

"Well, Doc., how do you find our patient?"

"I'm not the doctor," Peter replied. "I'm the patient. I'm the dwarf!"

Mr. Barnumbill opened wide his eyes, but he was not a man to be astonished for long.

"Fine boy!" he said. "I'm not surprised that my suit fits him so well."

"And if you but knew how witty he is, Mr. Barnumbill! It's incredible."

"Mary exaggerates a little," said Peter blushing.

"Huh! Queer happenings, my boy, and I don't see what the end's to be. . . . For the moment you can't stay stuffed in this van. C'mon out with me for the air. I'll pass you off as one of my relatives."

As they walked along they passed the Serpent Man, who was coming out of his caravan. He stopped close to them, and, as he was naturally inclined to melancholy, he looked spitefully on the broad-shouldered, open-faced fellow with the boss.

"How is the dwarf?" he asked.

"Not well," answered Mr. Barnumbill. "The doctor came a while ago and had him taken to the hospital."

"As good as gone," added Peter, with jovial impatience.

The Serpent Man wiped away a tear and, before going, said: "He was quite the nicest pal I ever knew. He was so tiny that there was no room in him for meanness. He was gentle, sir, and confident. When he put his wee hand in mine to go on for our act I can't tell you how happy I was."

Peter was moved. He would have liked to tell the Serpent Man that he was the dwarf, and that he was almost unchanged, but, at the same time, he was afraid to belittle himself, to acquiesce in his late limits. The Serpent Man threw him a hostile glance and went off sniffing. Mr. Barnumbill said to Peter:

"You had friends . . ."

"I'll have others."

"That's not impossible . . . but that one there was a sure friend who expected nothing from you."

Together they entered the circus, and they had to explain several times that the dwarf had just gone to the hospital and that he would not be seen again in the troupe. Everybody wiped away a tear and said how sorry they were. The Ringmaster, Koko the clown, Yanido and his three acrobat brothers, Miss Primrose the wire-walker, the Japanese

Jugglers, Julio the lion-tamer, and all the other artists of Barnumbill's Big Circus, all sighed that they had lost their best friend. Even the elephant wagged his trunk in a way that wasn't usual with him, and one could see that he was unhappy.

Yet nobody paid any attention to Peter, although Mr. Barnumbill introduced him as his cousin. It was as though he didn't exist, and he remained silent, a stranger, it seemed, to this great grief of which he was the cause. Surprised and shocked that no attention was paid to him he was furious at the dwarf for still taking up so much place.

In the ring the Serpent Man was doing his act—twining himself about the mast, going through a needle's eye, tying his legs in a double knot. A little envious, Peter listened to the murmurs of admiration that rose from the benches. He, too, had known the favour of the crowd, and he hoped, moreover, to know it again. This youthfulness of body and mind, this perfection he felt inside himself, why should not the public admire them?

Bored with the show and impatient to discover the world he took his way out and into the streets of the town. Happy to be rid of the dwarf, proud of his strength and freedom, he strode along the streets with exultation. But his intoxication was brief. The passers-by paid no more attention to him than to anyone of themselves.

"I've grown," he sighed, "and nothing happens to me at all. What's the use of being a good-looking man if it's not noticed? One might say that the world is only made for dwarfs.

After having walked for a quarter of an hour the sight of the town seemed to him extremely monotonous.

Never had he felt so lonely. The passers-by were very few, the streets dull and badly lit, and, remembering the flashing lights of the circus, he was sorry he had strayed from it. To kill time he went into a bar and ordered a beer, as he had

already seen the Serpent Man do. The owner, who yawned watching the clock, asked him with a vacant voice :

"How is't you're not at the circus?"

"I didn't have time. You neither?"

"No. I have to be here to keep the shop."

"In a way," said Peter, "you don't have a very gay life."

"Me?" protested the barman. "Why, I'm the happiest of men! I don't want to boast . . ."

He explained what his occupations consisted of. Peter didn't dare say what he thought, but it seemed to him that happiness was a very boring thing when one did not have the luck of belonging to a troupe of famous artists. Ignorant of these matters he went out without paying for his beer and returned to the circus.

Prowling about the stables Peter came upon Miss Germina sitting on her stool, while an ostler harnessed her horse. He took time to watch her without being seen.

He thought that it was only last night that he was sitting on the bareback rider's knees, and that he had leaned his head on the black velvet bodice. He reflected that he could not sit on Miss Germina's lap any more. He was too big and too heavy.

"My name is Peter," he said to the bareback rider.

"I think I saw you a while ago, sir. They told me you were a relation of Mr. Barnumbill's. . . . You'll find me quite dejected, for I've just learned that my friend, the dwarf, is in the hospital."

"That doesn't matter. . . . I want to tell you that you're very lovely. Your fair hair, I think it's grand, and your black eyes, too; and the nose, and the mouth. . . . I would be very happy to kiss you."

Miss Germina frowned and Peter was intimidated.

"I didn't want to annoy you," said he, "and I won't kiss

you until you ask me. But you are very lovely. The face, the neck, the shoulders, all are perfection."

In his candour he held out his two hands. Miss Germina was angry. She told him that one didn't act that way with a well-brought-up person; that she was a poor artist, but proud. He could not find anything to say to excuse himself. Riskily he seized on a piece of clap-trap which he had heard a hundred times coming from Koko or the Yanido brothers.

"Love made me lose my mind," he sighed. "Alas, adorable bareback rider, why must my eyes be troubled by your golden hair and your velvety glance?"

She found that he spoke well and listened to him willingly. Peter continued:

"But how can I make you understand that I would lay before your soul a fortune worthy of your beauty?"

The bareback rider gave a gracious smile, but Mr. Barnumbill entered at that moment and heard what was said.

"Don't listen to him," said he, "that lad hasn't a bent penny to his name. His speeches are even more lying than those of Koko, who at least has a fine clowning talent."

"I, also," retorted Peter, "I, also, have a fine talent. And the public never skimped their applause for me."

"And what do you do?" asked the bareback rider.

Mr. Barnumbill hastily spoke of something else and then pulled Peter outside.

"Let's talk a little of your talent," he said, when they were alone. "You can flatter yourself for having made a fine mess. Go right on now in the ring and we'll see if the public still applaud you. Really, it's just like you to be going about courting the girls when you don't know how you're going to earn your living. Have you even thought five minutes about that?"

"Earn my living?" asked Peter.

Seeing his innocence and that he suspected nothing of the



necessities of life, Mr. Barnumbill took it upon himself to instruct him. He explained the use of money, the difficulty an honest man has in getting it.

For the love of Miss Germina and because he understood that in life, unless you are a dwarf or an elephant, you must do something, Peter decided to be a great artist. Mr. Barnumbill, in consideration for past services, took upon himself the expenses of his apprenticeship. But first he had to choose a speciality. That of trapeze artist or acrobat had to be ruled out ; they required not only special gifts, but also a suppleness and bodily elasticity that couldn't be acquired when one had reached man's estate. So Peter began by taking lessons from Koko, but at the end of a few hours of work the clown told him that he had nothing to hope for in that direction.

"You'd never make a child smile. As I see it, you're too reasonably-minded and usual-acting to ever surprise your public by anything unexpected. You do things as you think them, and you think them in the way they should be done. It's not that good sense should be lacking in a clown, but we put it where it isn't expected, by a grimace or a twiggle of our toes. It's a habit that comes of itself when one has the taste for it ; but a man like you is wasting his time trying to be a clown."

Regretfully, Peter gave in to Koko's reasoning and began his apprenticeship as a juggler with the two Japanese. At the next little town they played he juggled fairly well with two wooden balls, but he felt he could never go much further ; and anyway, he did not like the game. He felt he was doing trickery with the natural laws that had all his approbation.

He apprenticed himself to other acts without much more success. In everything he showed himself to be handy enough, but not anything out of the ordinary. When he tried riding he succeeded as well as any mounted policeman, and Mr.

Barnumbill agreed that he had a good seat. But that was not sufficient; other merits were necessary to the pretence of being an artist.

Peter was so discouraged by all these failures that he did not dare watch the show any more; and the towns they passed through all seemed as dull as the one that he had first ventured out in alone. In the evening he preferred to all other company that of Old Mary, who still knew how to console him for all his deceptions.

"Don't you worry," said she, "everything will come out all right. You'll be a great artist like Mr. Yanido or Koko. Or else you'll become a dwarf again; that would be a fine thing, although you are better-looking the way you are."

It was already almost a month since Peter had grown when the Barnumbill Circus arrived at the Big City and pitched its tents. From the very first night a great crowd filled all the benches, and Mr. Barnumbill watched with a worried air the different acts on the programme. Peter stood behind the ring in the midst of the uniformed attendants and the artists awaiting their entry. He had lost all hope of having a career as a circus artist; his last try with Julio, the lion-tamer, had failed like all the others. He was too well balanced to risk himself without damage in the wild beasts' cage.

Peter watched Miss Germina galloping round the ring. Upstanding on her horse, her arms thrown out to the crowd, she smiled her acknowledgment to their applause; and Peter thought that not one of her smiles was for him. He felt weary and ashamed of his loneliness. He had just seen the majority of his companions do their act in the ring—Koko, the Yanido Brothers, Miss Primrose the Tightrope Dancer, the Serpent Man, the Japanese. Each one of these acts recalled a failure to him.

"This is the end," he sighed. "I'll never again go on in

the ring. There's no longer any place for me in the troupe of Barnumbill's Circus."

He cast a glance at the crowd and noticed at some distance away a space unoccupied because of a pole that spoiled the view. He went and sat down there and almost immediately forgot his sadness. All about him he heard them speak of the bareback rider, praising her grace and skill, and he mingled his words with those of his neighbours. Forgetting that he was Peter, he became one with the crowd and clapped heedlessly.

"How she smiles to us!" he murmured with the public's voice.

When the grand finale of the show came he let himself be borne towards the exit by a sea of spectators. He no longer thought of an artistic career and no longer felt the need of being admired. He was, on the contrary, happy to belong to the great flock and be no longer quite responsible for his person. Mr. Barnumbill, who had seen him sit down on the bench, watched him for a long time until he became in the crowd a point like the other points, then turning to the Ringmaster who stood by him, he said :

"By the way, Ringmaster, I didn't tell you. . . . The Dwarf is dead."



T. O. BEACHCROFT

*The Ringed Word*



## THE RINGED WORD

**C**ONWAY MARK: Conway Mark. Conway Mark. The footsteps would begin in a moment. His heart was beating. Now he might do it pat. Arthur shrank and shuddered back into the darkness of the hedge, crouched with beating heart and quick-drawn breath, like a wild animal waiting for a deadly foe to pass.

Then he caught Mark's footsteps. Pat-pat . . . now the noise of his feet rang on the distant road clear as forge strokes ; then the sudden quiet as he took the grass path. The field gate clicked a quarter of a mile away. And the night was so still he could hear his muttered cough. The bright frost and blazing moonlight preserved the faintest eruption of sound. Soon would come the delicate scrunch of the frosted earth beneath his feet. Unsteady footsteps.

There they came. True to time. The Government's time, Arthur thought, since that alone would make him stop drinking at ten—and then : every night. Blind to what was around the footsteps going home ; not using his faculties : faculties reduced to footsteps : the noise of the footsteps—pat. Alternate, mindless ; full blown, his sins full blown.

Arthur crouched in the hedge listening, straining, quivering ; the leaves and brambles, drained of colour in the vivid moonlight, the blackened roots, the grass tufts cobweb-grey at his feet, strained and listened with him.

Mark was near now ; the little gate at the foot of the hill shrieked and fell to with an iron clangour. How the still

night magnified the noise. Mark was in the same field ; now just at the foot of the hill.

The path wound up the steep hill close to the hedge where Arthur was hiding. Mark came on. As he passed the hedge Arthur rose quietly to his feet and, keeping a few strides behind, followed. He saw how the full glare of moonlight fell on the side of the chalk-pit ; the white cleft in the hillside shone in the night as if a searchlight were on it.

A few yards ahead of him Mark's dark figure toiled and stumbled upwards. The moment was near. At the top of the hill the path turned along the edge of the chalk-pit chasm. The naked edge. Mark swayed along in front ; beside him was the white cliff which dropped sheer and disappeared in shadows beneath.

One touch ; the sudden pressure of shoulder against shoulder. He could feel the sensation of the two shoulders meeting : a sudden thrust—I'm sorry—my God !—in his imagination it was almost done.

Fifty yards further on past that black bush would be the point ; he had marked it by daylight a score of times, a thousand times. That was the sheerest, deepest fall, the craggiest landing.

In the last fifty yards he felt exultingly excited : the body quivering, the mind outside it. He would touch Conway Mark now. Around his name all images of hate and dread crowded ; cruelty, luxury, the waking nightmare of broad daylight, the man without good, the child who had run with a toad and put it on the fire.

He poised himself to do it, then stopped. Mark stumbled along five yards ahead, now twenty ; now lost in the darkness. Arthur waited, listening, unable to move.

From the foot of the hill he had heard the iron gate clang to. Somebody was coming. He walked from the edge of the pit to the hedge again. No one came up the path : no



one in sight. The gate had swung in the wind : or a dog had pushed it. No one ever came that way so late.

He crouched for a long while. He closed his eyes and the iron clang went on and on. At the critical moment always that iron note, and the agony of having done it and finding it still undone lived over and over again. And the ironical clang.

Arthur Clifford looked through his library shelves : took out books here and there, flicked over the pages, and with an abstracted air replaced them. Finally he chose one, and carried it to his arm-chair. He poured coffee from a tall silver pot, port from a cut-glass decanter, and selected a cigar. His experiments had gone too well during the morning to be hurried further that day.

He smoked and sipped, the book lying unread on his knee. By daylight, by the daylight of after lunch, he could judge with serenity. The iron gate still rang in his mind, but now without any trace of horror. He had been on the point of accomplishing it when the gate had swung in the wind ; nothing more. He had hesitated rightly : his self-control was wisdom : his retreat to the hedge, even his fear, all had been reasonable.

Yet why should the gate have swung ? Was it a warning ? For a while his cigar burned unheeded and he sat motionless : then he smiled and turned to his coffee and port. It was an absurd notion, a mere night thought. That was just where reason supported him again : simply a trying test of resolution, private to himself.

He fell to glancing through his book, not reading it, but searching for something. All his books were marked for their bearing on one subject ; there were certain loved passages he approached with a physical sense of coming pleasure.

But as he glanced a strange mark caught his eye : a red ink-line in the margin : a single word circled neatly in red : a date of three years before, with two small query marks.

Extraordinary to have missed it : he must have passed it over a dozen times since. He began reading.

"Regarding in its essence, therefore, or according to the definition of its nature, virtue is a moderation, a middle state, but viewed in relation to what is best and right it is the extreme of perfection.

"But it is not all actions or passions that admit of moderation. There are some whose very names imply badness, as malevolence, shamelessness, envy, and among acts, adultery, theft, *murder*." (This was the ringed word : and he read now with growing dread.) "These and all other things like them are blamed as being bad in themselves, and not merely in their excess or deficiency. It is impossible to go right in them : they are always wrong : rightness or wrongness in such things does not depend on whether it is the right person and occasion and manner, but the mere doing of them is wrong."

He stared in front of him. An omen. An omen, chaos rising again and that word riding the storm ; the iron gate opening and shutting, plucking him back at the very fraction of the very second. And now in calm reflection to have found such a passage at such a time.

He sighed profoundly : his sigh welled away from him, filling the library and the winter air outside with its languor : the bare elm boughs beyond the panes, the grey hillside and the grey air beyond the elms quavered in the sad pulsations of his heart.

The door opened and closed. Arthur looked up and saw that Conway Mark had come in. He was a large man, not past forty, but already running to seed. His features were loose and flabby, drawing attention to a mouth that was

horribly shapeless: lacking the expressive mould, the humorous line, the scornful twist of tight-sewn avarice: a meaningless gap into the head, inside which the tongue could be seen moving.

Conway Mark looked round the room.

"Do yourself pretty well, don't you?" he said.

Arthur made no answer.

Mark took a cigar from the box. Arthur watched his flaccid mouth close round it.

"I said something," said Mark. "I said you do yourself pretty well."

"You know how I live," said Arthur. "There's nothing new about it."

"Do you ever hear what relations say about you?" Mark poured out some port, splashing it carelessly till it overflowed.

"Unfortunately, I can imagine it."

Mark appeared to find this funny. He laughed in the rather childish way that is common to chronic drinkers.

"Unfortunately you can imagine it," he repeated. "There's a hare in your field," he said suddenly.

"I know," said Arthur. "It's been there all the winter."

Mark laughed again.

"It's not there any longer: you won't see *that* hare again."

"Have you shot it?"

"I put some holes through it. It ran off into the copse—sideways." He laughed.

"Horrible!" said Arthur, rising from his chair and looking involuntarily through the window. "For God's sake, if you must shoot hares, do it when you're sober. Wounded animals are beastly."

"Tender-hearted Arthur," said Mark. "Dr. Arthur Clifford, the famous cancer research worker, benefactor of

the race : so kind to dumb animals—— Don't be a damn' fool. By the way, Arthur, I know you're always pleased to see me : I'll have some more port—and I thought we might celebrate my visit by something a little extra—fifty pounds by Saturday."

As usual Arthur noticed his eyes went down on to the carpet. It seemed more baffling and more disgusting always to have to talk with an eyeless face.

"By Saturday. I simply haven't got it. You know it's impossible as well as I do."

"What about your radium research grant? Didn't you get fifty pounds from them last week?"

"How do you know?"

"I wouldn't worry about that. I do know." He laughed the drunkard's peculiar laugh again.

"But look here," said Arthur, when he had come out of it, "I've got to spend that fifty pounds on research : there's apparatus to buy : it's not mine . . . besides, I'm more or less in honour bound to show the committee how it's spent : and . . ."

"It's damn' funny," said Mark, "to hear you get going about honour—*you* !" He laughed.

"And as for the radium research grant people, how would the committee like to know just how long you were mixed up with that fellow Chalkhill : or that you were actually in the *house* when that abortion case girl died—what was her name—Esther something or other? Are you in honour bound to tell them that?" He laughed again.

"Must you have the whole fifty?" said Arthur. "Say thirty."

"Well, say thirty," said Mark. "It's so plebeian to haggle. To-day?"

"I'll have to go to the bank."

"I'll come again. I'll come here at half-past ten. It'll

be on my usual way home from the village. I pass here every night."

"Yes," Arthur nodded.

Mark drew at his cigar.

"By the way," he said suddenly, "talking of that chap Chalkhill. Did you ever see him after that?"

"No."

"Well, I must say it was pretty good the way you shoved the whole thing on to him." He laughed. "Ruined him completely, didn't it?"

"I don't know what became of him. I've told you often enough. I was acting in pure ignorance. I understood there was a certificate regularly signed. I'd no idea. If it wasn't for you, I'd seek that chap Chalkhill out now and make every reparation to him. I'd give him money: but you drain me of every penny. *Then*, it was impossible for me to do anything. I was just getting the grant—and the radiology job. I had to put things in their true perspective."

Arthur paced about the room. Several times he made as if to speak: then began in a calm, even-toned voice:

"I can't tell how to appeal to you, but perhaps you'll listen while I try to explain a point. Cancer is a foul disease: every year it causes suffering and misery. To conquer it, to go any distance in conquering it, would be of incalculable benefit to the world. In a pure physical way: I'm not asking you to consider anything you can be sceptical about. It might happen that in my brain there is some special knowledge: some intuitive twist which could turn the corner in cancer research. But I've got to concentrate. I've got to live with it day by day—brain and emotions—especially emotions. Then I believe my mind would give the answer: almost like an unconscious instrument. It's a kind of creative job—the one thing that counts most isn't under control."

Mark said nothing.

"Now comes the point. I can't do it. You interrupt. Day by day you fill me up with other problems and violent, maddening emotions. I shall never do it like that. Isn't it, in your own judgment, worth leaving me alone for the sake of the job? Take a settled amount. Take half my income: or three-quarters—and leave me in peace."

For a moment he hoped against hope, as Mark appeared to hesitate, that it might still be ended this way.

"I wonder you go on wasting your breath," Mark said. "Do you think I'm going to be mixed up with bankers' orders and instructions to solicitors? We'll go on with the informal way, thank you. That suits me."

"Well, I say we won't go on this way. It's too important. There are two ways out, if you won't compromise at all: and I've made up my mind to take one of them."

"Yes?" said Mark.

"First, to let you produce the letter and everything you've got against me. . . ."

"Don't be a damn' fool, Arthur. You're much better off as you are. You'd lose the grant, and you might get let in for manslaughter."

"The other way," said Arthur, "is to kill you."

Mark nodded. "By God," he said, "that's the first sensible thing you've thought of to-day." He rose from his chair and came near. He peered into Arthur's face, smiling. "Only you haven't got the guts to do it!"

The door slammed and Arthur was left alone.

For an hour or more the taunt took the reins, driving his mind about. Conway Mark. Conway Mark. All dark, associations of evil. The enemy principle of life.

He became calmer and began again to look out books from the shelves. What was the answer to that passage? He sat down at his desk and wrote in silence. Later he read carefully through what he had written.

Reasons why I should :

1. Because in general principle to remove him would be a moral good. A bloody, bawdy, lecherous, treacherous villain.

2. Answer Aristotle's argument that murder is *always* wrong by discovering what murder is. Various definitions. American law distinguishes *degrees* of murder. In early English law to kill a Norman was murder, to kill a Saxon was not.

Coke's Institutes : "Where a person of sound memory and discretion unlawfully killeth any reasonable creature in being and under the King's Peace with malice aforethought."

But Conway is not a reasonable creature : not mere quibbling. Coke's carefully chosen definition.

3. The cancer research. "The greater moral good to be chosen in favour of the less." The end justifies the means.

4. *Cui licitas est finis etiam liceant media* : famous catchphrase from Busenbaum, which, taken in its context, goes on to say that the means should not be wholly bad but merely indifferent rather than good means. Conway's self-deliverance made unexpectedly easy the means surely no more than the act "indifferent." Various other people my money ought to be helping, including Chalkhill.

5. A kind of self-defence : choice between *felo-de-see* or Conway the lesser of two evils.

This paper finished, he folded it up and put it in his pocket. It lay on his breast as a final argument. The night was falling dark and cloudy.

He realised that he had forgotten to go to the bank for the money.

The wind was too high to-night for him to hear footsteps in the distance : the moon was in darkness and the chalk-pit lay on the hill-side unrevealed, a deeper element in the darkness. No footsteps in the distance : no warning cough : he would appear suddenly.

His heart was beating. Even now he was fighting the doubt that he could do it ; the dark decision and its wavering doubt border gleaming behind the decision like a rim of light. The decision not covering the doubt behind it : with impartial eclipse of reasons against it. Or was it only fear ? Fear of the consequences : fear of punishment. The Christian furies. He began to pray—thinking, not saying the words.

“God, maker of the world and men : help me, most insignificant of men. You made my reason ; stop it from choosing the wrong act. If now through a fault in my reason rather than my will the act is wrong, I pray for mercy. Let my death expiate the fault.”

He could add nothing. He felt calmer. Can God direct an action and punish its agent ?

Almost before he knew it he was following Conway stealthily up the hill. Foot by foot, Conway lurching in front. It had happened so often before. They were past the corner now, the dark figure in front stumbling perilously along the edge.

They came to the very point. Arthur stretching out his arm, saw in a flash the puniness of human reason : the unconquerable doubt, the voice in his mind of the one reality. . . . Suddenly Mark tripped : swayed for a moment on the very edge. From the darkness Arthur touched him lightly on the breast, and it was done. A crash came up as the carcass fell a hundred feet below : and then blank silence.

During the next few days the amazing release grew more and more intoxicating. The inquest removed his last qualms. He saw his life changed in an instant : an hourly pain gone for ever. Already his mind was making revelations in his work. In the library, where the winter sunlight streamed, the whole thing was unreal—a vanished nightmare.



A stranger was shown in to him.

Arthur looked at him long and uncertainly.

"Chalkhill," he said at length.

"You can't have forgotten me."

"You've changed."

"I've been through it," said Chalkhill, without expression.

"I'm glad you've come," said Arthur quickly. "I've been wondering how to find you. Recently my affairs have been changed. I have been wondering if I could help you."

"I've been about here for some time," said Chalkhill. "I knew you lived here."

"I've never seen you."

"Did you go to that inquest to-day, by any chance?" said Chalkhill.

"Yes," said Arthur.

"Death by misadventure?"

"Yes."

Chalkhill was silent.

"I'm afraid the chap was no good," said Arthur. "A chronic drunkard: that's how it happened—apparently."

"People don't always fall over edges by accident, do they?" said Chalkhill.

Arthur felt his mouth turn dry. He tried twice to speak, and failed. Chalkhill watched him impassively.

"What do you mean?" said Arthur, at length.

"You might fall over that cliff yourself one night."

"What do you mean?" said Arthur again.

"Don't you understand?" said Chalkhill. "Perhaps I counted on you understanding too quickly. The idea is too familiar to me. During these last two years I've reasoned it out almost every day."

There was an abnormal fixity in his eyes; a glance unnaturally intent, but expressionless.

"I'm not revengeful, Clifford. But when I think of your

actions in the past ; your life now—the speciousness of it ; your cancer grant, your reputation, I make certain conclusions. I don't know what crimes you may have committed since : that's not the point. It's the principle. I tell you again there's nothing personal about this. It's rational. I can quote you authorities for it. There are times when murder becomes morally right. I don't suppose you could understand that. Has it ever occurred to you, Clifford, that murder might be morally inescapable ?”

In a sudden access of terror, Arthur sprang to his feet.

“You're mad !” he cried.

But as he said it, he realised that it was true : that Chalkhill, who was now pointing something at him, had spoken this insane, paranoiac mockery of his own cool reasoning in all seriousness ; in deadly earnest.

“Of course,” said the madman, watching him with peculiar intentness, “the pit would be more artistic.”

JOHN HASTINGS TURNER

*The House in the Wood*



## THE HOUSE IN THE WOOD

I'VE got to put this thing on paper. I've told the story again and again, and I find, at the finish of it, that even my best friends are trying not to look slantwise at me. I don't blame them. It is, as one of them said to me, "a hell of a proposition." But the way I feel is that if once I can get the thing down in black and white it won't, so to speak, be on my mind so much. It was after I had told Bill Whiteman the story and asked him the question I always ask that I got the answer which I have written.

A hell of a proposition it may be . . . and perhaps I, too, ought to be where poor Robbie McClaren is—and he's been in an asylum these two years. . . .

I'd known Robbie since the days when we knocked cricket balls through his father's cucumber frames, and then told lies about it, for Robbie's father was about sixty years out of date, and Robbie feared him more than he feared Hell. I think if his mother had lived, or if his father had been another kind of man, Robbie might have been every bit as sane as the rest of us. But he was hunted—literally hunted—through his boyhood. . . .

But that has nothing to do with the story. He became an architect. He never did much at it. I believe his ideas were a bit impracticable, and, anyway, he wasn't long enough at the job to make his mark. He was twenty-eight when the thing happened, and I was two years his senior. Of course, I knew that Robbie was what people call "peculiar." That is

to say, he didn't fall in line with everybody else. He didn't play games, or shoot, or dance—in fact, the only thing he did do was to play the piano. His own stuff, and for all I know abominable—but I liked to hear him play for all that.

I had a little flat in Charing Cross Road, and one evening in the early summer Robbie blew in. I hadn't seen him for months, and I thought he looked rather used up.

"Look here, Roger," he said, "I want some air."

"You won't get it in Charing Cross Road," I answered.

"I want to go for a week—walking—anywhere," he went on. "Will you come?"

It was an attractive idea. The weather seemed set fair. The country would be at its best. I said I might.

"When I say anywhere," he continued, "I mean the Savernake Forest."

"Why?" I asked.

"I'm not going at all if I don't go there," he replied.

Well, I ought to have thought that a bit queer, I dare say, but I didn't. Robbie had always been a creature of whims, and if he'd set his heart on the Savernake Forest, why not? It's a lovely spot.

I said I didn't care where we went, and after a bit of a talk and planning things out, we agreed to make a start the following Saturday.

For a miracle the weather held, and as we walked out of Wantage, our faces set towards the downs, I think we both felt about eighteen. I can answer for myself at least, and Robbie's high spirits were almost embarrassing. He chucked his hat away over a hedge and sang lewd songs at the top of his voice. But Robbie had always hated towns, and became a different creature in the country. We tramped along for a couple of days, taking things easily, and I must confess I never remember such a grand time. The air was intoxicating, the turf like walking on a springboard, and a subtle, satisfying appeal was

coming to us from the very earth, the appeal of being English in England. (Robbie was Scotch, but he swore he felt it, too !) Those first two days were pure joy. . . .

On the third we were in the Forest itself, surprising squirrels and rabbits, and once, in the evening, an old badger. We deviated that night, and slept at the smallest inn we have ever seen in a village of which we didn't even ask the name. And, in the charming, contemptuous English way, the name not being written up for us anywhere, I do not know it to this day.

On the following morning we struck back into the Forest. And then I noticed that Robbie was beginning to hurry. He set about twice the pace we had been travelling. When I taxed him with it he slowed down, and made some silly joke about my getting an old man. But I noticed that he seemed curiously embarrassed.

A strange eagerness seemed to have got hold of him. It was as if—yes, almost as if he was pointing, like a dog. But at the time, though I noticed his mood, I gave it no serious thought. Why should I ? It was so like Robbie to have some unaccountable enthusiasm.

We lunched under a beech tree, and I remember a green woodpecker (shyest of birds) came and looked at us gravely from across the riding, and deciding that we were harmless, if unusual, continued his tap-tapping without taking any further notice.

When we had religiously buried our empty beer bottles and were watching the smoke from our pipes go spiralling up into the leaves, I said casually :

“Where do we turn in to-night, Robbie ?”

“Oh, I know a place,” he answered, and I noticed—or thought I noticed—a queer constraint in his voice, as if he was facing a crisis of some sort, a crisis which he knew would come. But I was sleepy, and paid no heed to it.

"Well, anyway," I murmured, "don't let's overshoot the mark again and have an extra two miles to the village at the end of the day."

For that was what we had done before, and two unexpected miles just when you're wanting your supper seem a day's journey. Robbie's voice became suddenly quite surly.

"It isn't a village," he said abruptly.

"Oh, look here, Robbie," I protested. "If you think I'm going to doss down in some broken-down woodman's shack and go without my dinner, you're on the wrong horse."

He struck a match to relight his pipe, and his hand trembled ever so little. "It's not a shack," he said. "It's anything but a shack." He seemed to be trying to control some intense excitement. He gave me the impression that he was angry with me for asking questions. But I wasn't going to stand that. It isn't good for a chap, even if he does have moods and whims, to be given in to all the time.

I said: "Well, you needn't be so mysterious about it."

He didn't answer for a moment or two, and when he did he had his back turned to me.

"It's a house," he muttered.

"A house?" I echoed. "What? Here in the middle of the Forest, miles from anywhere?"

"Yes," he said. He seemed to hate to talk about it.

"But it's impossible!" I cried.

He turned then, and I saw that he was furiously angry.

"It isn't impossible," he retorted. "I tell you, I know the house and I know the people who live there. I know the house well," he added in a gentler tone. As if he was remembering tenderly something happy about the place.

"Oh, all right," I answered, "but you never said anything about it before."

"Why should I?" he snapped, and I had no reply to that.

"I can't think how they carry on," I said, "marooned



like that. Why, they'd never get a servant to stay in the place!"

He seemed to turn that over in his mind for a few seconds. Then he said, with a sort of gentle, reminiscent smile, "They're old family servants; they've been there for years."

"All the same," I protested, "they may not be exactly pleased at two fellows blowing in without notice, both as hungry as hell."

"They'll be delighted," he said earnestly, "delighted! Didn't I tell you I'd known them for years?"

"Oh, well," I answered, "it's up to you." After which we took the road again, or rather the path, for the riding had narrowed down to a bridle-track and the woods were thick all round us. I couldn't help wondering what strange sort of birds elected to live in the middle of a forest, and, with my practical, everyday sort of mind, speculating on how they ran the place. And from that I got to wondering how on earth the house came to be built, for you can't, as far as I know, buy a plot in the middle of Savernake Forest. I even came to the point where I was considering the possibility of Robbie trying to play a practical joke on me, and, by this time feeling a bit "leggy," I thought what a rotten sort of joke it would be, and promised myself a real row with Robbie when he exploded it.

Meanwhile, Robbie himself was going faster and faster. Hang it, he was racing along as if he were on the Stock Exchange Walk! And his face! It was purple with excitement and his eyes were glittering like . . . like a panther on the trail. I thought: "Damn!—he's been sitting on wet grass, and he's got a chill and he's feverish." And I wondered what on earth I'd do about it, for Robbie was not strong, and if he was going to be ill he'd have complications quicker than anybody on earth.

But just as I was speculating on these lines we turned a corner abruptly and came upon the house. I must confess I was

relieved to see that house. If Robbie had taken a chill we could at least get a hot-water bottle and a whisky and lemon for him. And I took another sidelong look at the man. I was astonished at the change in him. The mere sight of the house seemed to have returned him to the normal. He stood quite still, looking at it with a sort of appreciative smile.

"Well, here we are," I said at last, "and damn it, Robbie, you've almost walked me off my feet."

"Sorry," he replied. "You see, I got in a funk that I shouldn't be able to find it."

So that was it. But fancy working oneself up into such a state! Thank God, I had an ordinary workaday temperament that refused to fatigue itself!

Then, for the first time, I took a real look at the house itself. It was a new house—and that gave me a bit of a shock, because, for some absurd reason or other, I had expected an old one.

But this was quite new—so new, indeed, that the polygonum they meant to train up its walls was merely a row of spindly branches, and in the freshly laid lawn one could still see the gaps between the turves. As for the house itself, it was pleasing enough to look upon—built on two floors, with green shutters to the windows, which somehow or other gave it a foreign appearance. And yet, though it was an ordinary enough kind of house at first sight, there was something about it . . . some oddity which struck one, as such things will, even before one has time to see exactly what it was. But in another second, as we were approaching the front door, I saw what made the place look unusual. The roof. From each end of the long, low house it rose with a gentle slope to a point in the centre. I'd never seen a roof built like that, and now that I did I couldn't help feeling that, with a long, low house like that, the effect of that slight slope and the centre angle where it met was rather pleasing.

I said as much to Robbie.

"Curious kind of roof," I commented, "but, in a way, rather effective, don't you think?"

"Do you?" he said, with a curious eagerness. "Yes, I agree. I like it immensely . . . immensely!"

I thought his sudden enthusiasm rather odd, until I remembered that he was an architect, and that these things meant a great deal more to him than they did to me.

He rang the bell, and, in the interval before the door was opened, I noticed that it was as much as he could do to keep still.

A maid opened the door and recognised him immediately.

"Mr. McClaren," she said, and smiled at us; then she added: "I'll go and tell the master at once."

But Robbie stopped her.

"And Miss Dorothy?" he said. "She's at home, isn't she?"

"Oh yes, sir," answered the maid. "Miss Dorothy is at home." I thought then that I understood everything. Robbie's excitement, his embarrassment (for that, of course, was the explanation of his bad temper), everything. But why on earth couldn't he have told me about Dorothy? After all, we had been friends for years.

I was congratulating myself on such a simple explanation of what I had foolishly thought to be a feverish attack when I saw an old gentleman coming down the stairs to meet us. When I say old, I mean that he was what men of our age call old. I dare say he was round about sixty; and one of the most charming-looking men I've ever seen. His expression of welcome to us both, not only in his words but his face, made one feel in an instant that in that house one could never be a stranger again.

His arm went round Robbie's shoulder, but he smiled at both of us as he said: "Now, what would you two boys like?"

A drink right away—or a wash first, and join Dorothy and myself for cocktails in a quarter of an hour?”

We chose the latter, and were shown to our rooms. Our host insisted on coming with us himself. I remember when he left us, feeling what a pity Robbie's father hadn't been that kind of man. He radiated everything that was generous, everything that was lovable. And evidently he was used to entertaining. My room looked as if I had been expected at this very moment. Robbie came in to me, after a wash and brush-up, and I commented on the readiness of things. I remember he walked to the window and sighed, a deep, contented sort of sigh. And then he turned and said quite simply :

“But you are Roger—I've always been expected here.”

We went downstairs, and Dorothy gave us cocktails. She was a lovely girl, with a sly sense of fun that made one feel there was no barrier between the sexes after all.

I'd begun to look on myself as a confirmed bachelor, because I believed that, in the really intimate concerns of life, it is impossible to get on terms with a woman. But if you could . . . I mean, if her mind really marches with your own . . . Well, I must admit that after my second glass of port I regarded Robbie as an undeserving young devil. Then those two disappeared somewhere or other, and Dorothy's father smiled at me and produced some old brandy, and said it was good to look at them, wasn't it? And I said it was. And I felt it, too. For there was something about that house and its occupants that somehow made you see life properly.

And then Dorothy's father asked if I would like to see over the place, and, of course, I said “Yes,” and he showed me every hole and corner in a way that made me know he loved it. And later Robbie and Dorothy joined us ; and Robbie enthused over the place as if it were his own, which, I reflected, it might well be, one day. And—I may as well confess the thing—I was a little jealous of Robbie.

I remember thinking, just before I dropped off to sleep that night, that it was rather a rotten sort of feeling to have had.

And the next day, off we went again. I tried to rag Robbie, in the silly way men do, about Dorothy, but he got savage about it, and I shut up. We walked in silence for some time, and I had leisure in which to think that it isn't really such a grand joke—people falling in love, I mean. Nobody sees anything tremendously funny about Primavera or Héloïse and Abélard. What blasted cads we make of ourselves—following silly conventions! I remember I tried to apologise to Robbie, and he said, "That's all right," and said it, too, as if it didn't matter a damn what I'd said—because, I suppose, I was too small to count in the world he was living in just then. And I thought how right he was, and I felt a bit humble, and, as a sort of punishment, I put up with the long silent walk that followed. I asked no more questions, and I certainly made no more silly jokes. We found our way to another country inn, and had the simple dinner they provided.

And it was there that it happened. Suddenly—straight out of the blue—in that shabby little coffee-room, Robbie gave a queer cry and burst into tears.

I got him up to his room somehow or other (I can still see the shocked and deprecating eye of a local farmer who had dined there too). In the bedroom Robbie went mad. What I mean is, I believe that it was there his brain actually snapped. He did incredible things, he said incredible things. I'm not going to set them down here. I locked the door, found the landlord and got him to send someone for the local doctor. By the grace of God he was a man who knew more than he need of, in that little place. When I took him into Robbie's room Robbie was stretched full-length on his bed, naked, with the tears streaming down his face. I can't remember very much about what happened in that room. The doctor asked Robbie a question or two, and I remember him turning up his

eyelids. Then he drew the coverlet over Robbie's stark, twitching body, and he and I went outside.

"I'm going to ring up for an ambulance," he said, "and your friend will be taken to London."

"What's happened to him?" I asked.

"I can't tell you that," answered the doctor; "I wish I could. If I could I'd be one of the world's greatest men. But I'm afraid I can tell you his condition. He's insane, poor chap. I may be wrong, but I think he's been insane for a considerable time. Something has brought it to a head, that's all."

. . . . .

So they took Robbie to London, where certain formalities were gone through, and Robbie disappeared to the place where now he is.

But I, being his friend, though I felt helpless, yet imagined it was at least my duty to tell the old man in the house with the strange roof, and to ask him, as gently as he could, to tell his daughter Dorothy.

Perhaps you can guess what happened?

There was no house in the wood; there was no charming old gentleman; there was no Dorothy. They told me that at the inn, but I wasn't satisfied, and I went back myself to the very spot.

There were trees, and a little winding path, through little bushes struggling towards the sun. There was no place where a house could ever have been.

And yet . . . I've got to confess it.

I can still see that charming host, I can still see Dorothy, disappearing with Robbie into the newly-made garden. I can still tell you every hole and corner of the house which the old man so lovingly showed me. I can even see the old court-cupboard, out of which he brought the decanter of liqueur brandy. . . .

Yet I'm allowed to go about my business while poor Robbie. . . .

Still, they tell me he's perfectly happy. They say he spends most of his time drawing plans for grandiose and impossible palaces.

Well, I've written the thing down now, and although it's probably not particularly interesting, it has given me a certain amount of comfort in the doing. And if I am going mad . . . somebody will know why. I shall just put this MS. in my desk, and it will be found . . . afterwards.

I wrote this yesterday, with an idea in my head that I wouldn't cumber the earth with my presence much longer. Yes. I'd even taken the old Service revolver out of the drawer and had a look at it . . .

But thank God . . . thank God . . . I'm sane !

They found a note at Robbie's office, saying that if anything happened to him, I was the only friend he had, and he would like me to go through his papers. I spent an afternoon carrying out Robbie's wish.

And all of a sudden I came across a careful and minute plan of the house in Savernake Forest ; the queer roof . . . everything. I recognised every room, every corner. And just underneath it, on a sheet of notepaper, I found a poem. It was written "To Dorothy," and, though no power on earth would make me write it down here, I can say that it described the Dorothy I knew beautifully and completely.

And then, suddenly, I knew.

This was Robbie's ideal house, Robbie's ideal father, Robbie's ideal girl. He had created them all for himself. He had lived with them, dreamt with them, and then, alone with me in the forest, his brain, so much more vivid than my own, had made the thing real to me too.

That's all. But perhaps you'd like to know the question I always put when I tell this story.

"Do you think," I ask, "that it is possible for an hallucination which is a real and vivid thing to a lunatic, to be so impressed upon the mind of another chap that it materialises at least for the time being?"

When I asked Bill Whiteman that he just said : "It's a hell of a proposition."

I suppose it is. But I've no doubts whatever myself.



MARJORIE BOWEN

*The Pleasant Husband*



## THE PLEASANT HUSBAND

THE lover felt uncomfortable ; not all the perfume of oleander and myrtle could sweeten his sense of moral nausea.

And yet there was nothing wrong, at least with the setting ; the Italian night, the mountains, the sea, the pinewood, the scented stillness, the moon rising behind a bar of dark purple clouds . . . the woman waiting for him.

“Just like a stage set,” he thought and knew that that was the last thing that ought to have occurred to him.

He looked at the dark villa and leant against the little gate, trying to reason himself into a better mood.

Whatever was wrong must be with himself ; there was nothing the matter with the situation ; he was in love with Olivia, and she was going to run away with him, leave her stupid, indifferent, tyrannical husband, who thought of nothing but his collection of shells, and really enjoy, for the first time, all those good things that should have been her heritage.

He, the lover, had money ; it would all be done very well indeed ; there need be nothing sordid or unpleasant about any of it, all would be a matter of fast trains, good hotels, plenty of pocket money and an assured future—surely an ideal elopement.

When then was the matter ?

Perhaps Olivia’s romantic notion that he should come for her like this in the evening, meet him by the little gate and slip

through the quiet fields to catch the Genoa express . . . of course, he ought to have liked it, as Olivia had planned it, and it certainly was very suitable. . . .

He glanced up at the moon, hoping to find consolation there ; but the moon looked very conventional, like a worn-out stage property.

"It's the twentieth century," muttered the lad, "that is what is wrong. One oughtn't to do these things now . . . there is something . . . silly . . . about it."

That was it, something silly ; what in the name of Heaven had induced him to come to this particular spot and wait for this particular woman ?

Of course he was in love—but, well, there *was* something silly about it.

"I expect it is the newspapers," he thought. "Cleopatra's suicide and the Romeo and Juliet affair would have been just cheap and sordid reported in the Press . . . the world's got over that sort of thing like schoolboys get over the measles and the mumps. . . . Olivia *ought* not to have asked me and I ought *not* to have come."

Besides, she was late ; he heard the clock strike from the church of the neighbouring village ; it would mean a brisk walk to the railway station, and the lanes were heavy walking.

He pushed open the gate cautiously and peered through the gloom for a glimpse of Olivia.

Tiresome of her to be late ; he was sure that she was "dressing the part"—a white dress, a cloak, a case of jewels . . . he was sure of it ; his sense of the touch of ridicule over the whole thing deepened ; he hoped they would not look fools in the train, he wished that he had told her to come suitably dressed.

When she still delayed, he began to wonder if he could not send her back when she did come ; really, they ought to think

it over longer, far better turn in now and sleep on it . . . that Genoa train was atrociously uncomfortable, the spring night was cool and induced to sleep—he even yawned.

A light flickered among the oleander bushes ; that was rather rash of her and really the mood was quite strong, like limelight ; he stepped inside the gate in his eagerness to meet her and tell her to put her lantern out.

He stepped towards the wavering circle of light that showed up the waxy cluster of blossoms and the long grey green leaves of the oleanders.

“Is that you, Creed ?” asked a cheerful masculine voice.

The lover stood still, curbing a childish desire to take to his heels, and then the light discovered, engulfed him, displayed him from head to foot and delivered him to the gaze of Olivia’s husband.

“I thought I heard you,” said that person, pleasantly, “but I was not quite sure ; the waves make such a noise.”

“Just going past—back to the hotel after a ramble,” said Creed, steadily—“thought I heard someone in your garden, so stepped in——”

“Never mind about all that,” interrupted the other, “come into the house.”

He held his little storm lantern leaving the bushes, and in the glow of it stood, picked out from the background of the dark masses of the villa and the dark outline of the house.

The lover, looking at his familiar, rather stupid face, the bold forehead, the spectacled eyes, the rather ragged fair beard, the slightly stooping figure in the rubbed shantung—he never would trouble to change for dinner—felt more than ever foolish.

“I can’t stop,” he said quickly, “thanks awfully, but there are a couple of letters I want to catch to-morrow’s mail—must get them in before midnight——”

“But you really must come in,” insisted the other, in his

high, rather querulous, voice, "there is something important I want to say——"

"Well, to-morrow——"

"No, now——"

Creed had to submit : something had evidently gone very much amiss with the whole plan ; he did not really very much regret the postponement of the elopement, but he did not want to go into the house and play out some sort of a comedy before Olivia ; she would be sure to look tragic and to have Chopin open on the piano ; of course, the mistake of the whole affair was that this *was* the twentieth century, and people didn't do these things . . . if you tried, you looked and felt a fool. . . .

He followed his host through the low window which had often proved so effective a frame for Olivia's charms when she stood there to welcome him into the thrice familiar room that the Lauries had made so English, and so pleasant.

Olivia had always had her carpets and her draperies, her lamps and her tea from London, the "antique" furniture, the basso-relievos and the pictures from Florence ; it was all very pleasant.

The white glare of the acetylene was veiled by rosy silk, the fireplace was banked with boughs of camellias, red and white ; the last books from London and Paris lay half unwrapped near the Italian lace-work Olivia was learning ; the chairs were very comfortable, whisky and glasses, syphon and cigars were ready ; all as usual ; how really crazy it all made the idea of an elopement seem !

Creed began to tell himself that, of course, he would never have thought of it had it not been for Olivia's extremely romantic disposition. . . .

He seated himself on the long box ottoman he and his love had turned into a couch by means of draperies of rose-red damask and piles of cushions of different tapestries ; they had "picked up" all these pieces wandering together in the

streets of Florence ; it was such a favourite seat of theirs that he took it almost mechanically as Laurie seated himself in a long comfortable chair and drew the pink shade farther over the lamp so that the rosy glow of the room was deepened.

The lover took off his hat and loosened his light overcoat, the husband leant back comfortably and crossed his legs ; he had rather fine ankles and always wore silk socks.

Creed was glad that Olivia was not there ; this was bad enough, but if she had been there he would have felt quite a fool.

Laurie looked at him from behind the thick pebbles of his glasses that magnified his rather full brown eyes.

"My dear fellow, I know exactly how you are feeling, exactly. And really there is no need. Above everything—nothing ridiculous. You agree?"

"Of course," said Creed, quickly. "I don't know quite what you mean——"

"Let me make my point clear. Now, you came here to-night to run away with my wife, which was silly."

Creed coloured ; it was so precisely his own thought that he did not know how to gather together the rags of his tattered romance.

"Please don't say anything," continued Laurie, in a leisurely tone, leaning well back among his cushions. "This is the twentieth century. And, well, we've rather cut these things out."

"That is exactly," said Creed, with some eagerness and relief, "what I have been thinking."

"People don't run away with other men's wives nowadays without being ridiculous—especially in this childish way—a moon and all that sort of thing——"

Creed felt most uncomfortable and bound to defend his thwarted action.

"We aren't unique," he said ; "look at the papers——"

"Exactly. Look at them. They show you the futility of the whole thing. Just why it is impossible for people like yourself and Olivia to do such things. My dear fellow, it is so stupid."

"Quite," agreed the lover, dismally. "I suppose I lost my head——"

"No. It was Olivia. I had to talk seriously to her just now, she was becoming quite hysterical and undignified. However, I soon induced her to see reason."

"She has given the idea up?" asked Creed, beginning to feel more comfortable; after all, by the rosy light of the familiar lamp it could surely all be regarded as just a wildish sort of joke.

"Entirely," said Laurie, who was now quietly smoking. "Olivia has entirely given up the idea. She did so, as a matter of fact, as soon as I spoke to her."

"How did you find out?" asked Creed, feeling extremely fatuous.

"I had been observing you for some time—the slippered pantaloons, you know, with plenty of leisure on his hands! I saw where your flirtation was leading you—Olivia's agitation to-day betrayed her—I did not have much difficulty in getting at the truth."

"It is very decent of you to have taken it like this," said Creed.

"What did you expect, my dear fellow? You hardly thought to see me, with my glasses and knock knees and absentmindedness, and all those other little trials that annoy Olivia so—playing the Othello? Imagine me as the jealous husband! Absurd."

"Quite," agreed the lover, hastily. "Naturally, we knew you would be sensible about it—this—this running away was well, really just to please Olivia——"

"Just to please Olivia," interrupted Laurie.



"Like you might give a child a sweet—I understand so well! The moon, the oleanders, the flight! hah! hah!"

"That was precisely the situation," answered Creed, warming to his subject. "Of course I'm very fond of Olivia and all that, but, well, I had that feeling all along—*these things are not done nowadays.*"

"Exactly—for a dilettante like yourself, my dear Creed, the whole thing must have been distressingly crude."

He had now finished his cigarette, and as he leant back in his easy chair he put the tips of his long fingers together; he had fine hands, polished and delicate as one of his own prized shells.

"I know you think that I know more about conchology than human nature, but this little tangle has come my way, and I must try to adjust it," he continued. "I have dealt with Olivia—she will hardly refer to the matter again—she is so entirely convinced of the force of my arguments—there only remains yourself, my dear Creed."

"But if Olivia is satisfied, so am I," said the lover, "really, there is nothing now to be said—it was just an escapade——" Laurie waved one of his hands.

"I want to be quite fair," he interrupted. "I want you to see Olivia—and if you, after seeing her, are still of the same mind, why, then I shall take steps, rational, sane steps, to give her to you——"

But Creed did not care at all for this proposed interview; he had had enough agitation for to-night; he wanted to go back to his comfortable bed in the hotel . . . he hoped they would all meet in the morning as if nothing had happened.

"No, no," he said, hastily. "You've put everything on such a sane basis, Laurie, that I couldn't think of reviving—any—any such foolishness; as you say, this is the twentieth century."

The door opened with a suddenness that caused both men to start.

Lucia, the Lauries' maid, stood in the doorway.

Laurie rose with a quick sound of annoyance. "I didn't expect you back to-night, Lucia, I told you to stay with your mother to-night—how strange you never understand!"

The girl smiled cheerfully.

"But I did understand, signor! I was to go for the eggs, to Camoldi, and to bring them back in the morning—because it is so far——"

"Yes, yes," said Laurie, testily, "why did you come back to-night?"

The girl triumphantly lifted a corner of her shawl and showed a basket on her arm.

"I did not need to go as far as Mother Podeva for the eggs, old Cecco had some, fresh as fresh, so I came back—can I get anything for the signor?"

Laurie did not answer, he seemed unaccountably vexed; he stood staring at the girl through his thick glasses and stroking his sparse beard.

Creed could not understand at first; how strange, he thought, for Laurie to send the girl on such an errand, so late, and tell her to stay away the night, then, gazing at his host's embarrassment, he saw the reason; of course, the servant had been sent away while Laurie had his little scene with Olivia and while he dealt with himself, Creed; she was not to overhear nor to see—she was to stay away all night to give Olivia a chance to recover herself; it was really very thoughtful and tactful of Laurie—one knew what gossips these women were, and here she was, blundering back into the middle of it; no wonder that Laurie looked vexed.

Creed made an effort to help the situation. "I really must be going," he said, taking up his hat and rising. "I am late already."

"My dear fellow!" interrupted Laurie, quickly. "You must forgive me! This foolishness, about the eggs! They are so scarce, so very scarce. I cannot do without one in the morning, egg in marsala! How foolish! Quite an anti-climax, my dear Creed!" He was talking rather loudly, no doubt, thought Creed, to give Olivia, presumably recovering herself upstairs, warning that the servant had returned.

"Yes, the eggs are very, very difficult to get," smiled Lucia. "But I thought I should get them nearer than Camoldi!"

"Yes, yes," answered Laurie. "A moment, Creed, excuse me a moment——"

He followed the servant out of the room and closed the door.

"I'll slip away," thought the other man. "And get back before they shut the hotel up—old Laurie is getting agitated. I'll see him to-morrow—though really everything is settled——"

He opened the window and looked up at the sky, carelessly, to see if the moon held. And then a rather remarkable thing happened.

The moon, that had seemed so conventional and stagy, had now a very distinct face in it, and, as Creed looked, this face seemed to snarl at him and lean out of the sky and snap like a vicious animal.

Creek felt the perspiration break out round his forehead and nose . . . the whole affair had been affecting his nerves after all . . . he stepped back into the room to mix himself a drink . . . a stiff drink.

Strange he hadn't noticed before how perfectly horrible the room was; and the rose-coloured ottoman he had been sitting on, why, it was a ghastly piece of furniture . . . he stood looking at it, instead of mixing himself that drink.

A scrap of white stuff had been shut in one corner. . . . So Olivia kept things in it . . . what things?

He pushed off the cushions and lifted the ottoman lid.

Olivia herself lay inside, slightly doubled up, with a neat bullet wound in her temple.

As the ottoman lid banged down the door opened.

Creed, running with incredible speed through the shadowed garden, heard John Laurie beating after him, through the oleander bushes, howling because he had been cheated of his second victim.

THOMAS BURKE

*The Shadow and the Bone*



## THE SHADOW AND THE BONE

**A**ND this young man (said Quong) knew nothing of green hills or orchards or harvest-fields. He was a slave, and he could see but one of two things—either the chains of his slavery, or a world of legend and imagination where slavery was not. He could see the bald buildings of the world of commerce, and an office and a desk, and the pavements that led him to the desk ; and he could see that other world. But he could see nothing between them—nothing of the changing sky or of the sublime mystery of the life that streamed about his daily day.

He was a slave.

He lived in Poplar, and twice each day, upon six days of the week, he walked the Commercial Road to reach his work at Aldgate, and to return from his work to his lodging in Poplar. He knew that pattern of the whole of this two miles of pavement. The cracks in its stones, and the hollows in the wood-blocks of the road, were as familiar to him as the lines of the loathsome book in which he daily wrote columns of figures, as familiar to him as the hills and the stars to the shepherd.

But beyond these lines his eyes jumped the immediate splendours about him into a world that lay a million leagues beyond the ocean at the edge of this planet. For that world nowhere touched his world of chains, and only in that world, he felt, could one be happy. (Slaves always feel like that.)

In it lived people gracious of soul and body, neither slaves

nor the masters of slaves. It was a world where the sea was kind, and the breezes were opulent with spice, and life was vibrant with hours that were each a garden of white-winged thoughts.

A world, I need not tell you, that does not exist until you are dead. And perhaps not then.

But one morning he lifted his eyes from the stones that led to the wood of his desk, and his heart said : "Oh !"

It was a winter morning, and London was slowly revealing its features in the light of a wan sun, and its streets—even the streets of commerce—were thrilling with impetuous morning life. Great regiments poured through the gorges and the defiles. Doors of offices swallowed them, and as they disappeared, reinforcements came from nowhere, and they, too, were swallowed.

He said "Oh !" because, in lifting his eyes from the stones, he was vouchsafed a vision, and the vision told him that beauty does not dwell only in Heaven. Beauty smiled upon him from an advertisement hoarding ; a beauty that made all slaves free, and healed their wounds, and blessed them with understanding. It was not the beauty of green hills, or of sea-coast, or of pastures. It was the beauty of a human creature that held all this other beauty distilled in its own human beauty.

The intention of the picture was to proclaim the merits of a certain cigarette, though in this case the picture failed in its intended effect.

Not only did the young man fail to buy cigarettes ; he had no thought of cigarettes, and did not even notice the name of the exceptional cigarette.

But he did notice the picture, and he noticed it with his whole being, so that he stood dumb before the flower whose perfume had pervaded all his dreams. Here was beauty, not of the unattainable world, but of this world.

For the poster was not made from a drawing or a painting :



it was no work of a questioning imagination like his own ; it was made from a photograph. By this the young man knew that somewhere in the world that girl was living, and this knowledge made the world suddenly desirable, and made Fenchurch Street as cool and green as any avenue of the countries behind the moon.

For the rest of that day, after two minutes' adoration of the picture, his mind was a conflict of extreme misery and extreme rapture—for so does all true beauty affect us. The stain and decay of his daily world were at once intensified and eased : he felt their horror more sharply because of that picture, and yet, because of it, he was solaced and strengthened to face them.

He carried it away in his eye, and he saw it on the walls of the office where he hung his coat, and he saw it on his desk, and on the pages of his ledger : and from whatever angle he saw it the eyes smiled tenderly upon him.

He spent half of his lunch-hour in walking up and down before the picture, and the afternoon—a waste space to be trudged through before he could again drink at the cooling spring—he spent in imagining the girl in her marvellous home ; imagining her at her marvellous tea ; imagining her marvellous bedroom ; imagining the foolish people about her who were blind to the miracle of her ; imagining her in different dresses.

He even tortured himself by imagining confident clods making love to her.

I need not descant upon the ensuing state of this young man. His life was given to a picture : every breath, every thought, every movement centred on it.

He began to spend his evening walking round those streets of London where posters were displayed. He developed a friendly feeling for those streets where this picture was displayed, and a distaste for those where it was not. One day

he found it in the advertisement pages of a newspaper, and he cut it out. And he found it in a weekly journal and he cut it out.

And one of these cuttings he pinned over his bed, and one he pinned over his mirror, and the third he pinned over his fireplace.

Sad and foolish and glorious was the state of that young man. He did not know how happy he was. He thought he was miserable. Thinking thus, he sought for the cause of his misery, and found that it came from a desire to stand face to face with this beauty. Wondering how he could appease that desire, he came to a matter-of-fact solution which seemed to his disordered mind to be an inspiration. If that picture was a photograph, the cigarette company must have bought it from a photographer. If they bought it from a photographer, the photographer must at some time have been in contact with the original. Therefore, he had only to find the photographer, and . . . then he would throw up his job and work his way round the world until he tracked this supernal beauty.

And when he had found her he would go to her and say : "Lady, you are beautiful. I worship you !" and then retire for ever into his galley, his gesture made, his destiny fulfilled ; himself a tragic figure among the world's tragic figures.

So he bought some good notepaper and wrote to the cigarette company, stating that he had observed with interest the picture by which they were then advertising their goods—which was fact—and proceeding with the fiction that the photograph was so good that he desired to have some pictures of his wife made by the same photographer. Could they supply him with the name of the photographer ?

The cigarette company, with that courtesy which distinguishes those who have anything to sell, expressed their regret that they were not in a position to supply the name of the photographer of the picture in question : they had purchased

it from the well-known advertising agency, Slogan and Associates, whose address was such-and-such. They had no doubt that Slogan and Associates would be happy to supply him with the name of the photographer, and They Were, His Faithfully.

So, on the same good notepaper he wrote to Slogan and Associates, and Slogan and Associates, whose offices were spotted with white cards that flamed red-lettered exhortations to their staff to "Do it Now," answered sixteen days later that they had purchased the picture in question from a photographer in Blackfrairs Road.

That day, during his lunch-hour, to Blackfriars Road he went, heartened on his journey by many a sight of the world's essence of beauty. But at Blackfriars Road he learned that the photographer had left there some time ago, and was now to be found at an address in Camden Town.

He devoted the evening to the Camden Town journey, found the photographer at home, and, again using fiction out of its true purpose of entertainment, announced that he was connected with a West End theatre which sought to dress its new show with London's Loveliest Chorus, and that the lady of the cigarette-poster had caught the manager's eye. Where could she be found?

The photographer, whose name, incredible as it may appear, was Anastasius Herrick, was an affable and unaffected young man, although he wore a velvet coat and silken hair and the rest of the make-up which marks the camera-artist from the common artist. He received his visitor with a friendly and honest smile. And after the smile, he said: "Blimey!" And then: "Blimey—now you've done me. I took that picture—lemme see—coupler years ago. Friend o' mine—City man—brought her along. I only dug it up about three months ago. Occurred to me that it might suit the Poo-Jah cigarette people. They was using girls just then. So I bunged it along to my

agents. They took it like a shot. Nice price, too. But where she is now—ah ! One thing I can tell you. She *used* to live at Kensington—89, Grimlace Road. Whether she's there now. . . . Might be, o' course. Might not. Still, it's worth trying. Nice girl, she was. Iris Lone was her name."

So the next night he made long and serious preparation for a meeting with his goddess, and was as particular about his toilet as the Messrs. Ricordi are about the use of two bars of Puccini's music.

When he was as near to satisfaction with the toilet as a young lover can hope to be, he put on his best suit and his best hat, which made him look slightly ridiculous, and went to Grimlace Road, which is not one of the best roads of Kensington.

He knocked at the door of the house to which he had been directed, and when it was answered he took off his ridiculous hat and asked for Miss Iris Lone.

The agreeable person who answered the door told him that Mrs. Lone and her daughter had lived there as paying-guests but had left a year ago. When he asked if the agreeable person knew the address to which they had moved, she said she did not ; and when he pressed for clues, she had none to give, save that Mrs. Lone had had an account at the local branch of the Imperial Bank, whose manager would surely know her present address.

So the next day, by an unconvincing excuse of illness, he contrived to leave the office after lunch, and to reach the Kensington branch of the Imperial Bank before closing-time. He asked to see the manager, and, after some minutes spent in a glass cage, he was conducted to the manager. He took off his ridiculous hat and placed it on the manager's desk, and asked for the present address of a client of the bank, Mrs. Lone.

You need not be troubled with his adventures in this office, for we are all aware that there are two things which

can seldom be extracted from bank managers, and the other one is information. The manager fixed his eyes on the ridiculous hat, and while his lips said that he regretted that his position debarred him from giving information concerning his clients, his eyes sang loudly: "Where did you get that hat?"

So the ridiculous hat went away, and went back to Grimlace Road, Kensington, and knocked again at the house that had once sheltered the world's beauty. This time our young man made a rapid pass of his hand to the hand of the agreeable person who answered the door, and besought her to ransack her memory for some clue to the present whereabouts of Mrs. Lone.

Whereupon, the agreeable person recalled that Mrs. Lone had removed her goods to an address unknown by the aid of a firm of furniture removers whose premises were to be found in a street near Olympia.

Well, the young man went from Grimlace Road to the premises of the furniture removers, and there, in the cause of romance, which is the world's first and best lie, he lied again. He represented himself as a nephew of the family returned from the colonies—to which the ridiculous hat was confirmation—and begged them to search their records for the address to which the family moved.

Very courteously—being a commercial house—they searched their records, and within twenty minutes they gave him the new address of the family. The new address of the centre of the world. The address where he might see glory and loveliness face to face. They remarked on the address. They said that families often moved from that place to Kensington, in the natural course of progress, but seldom from Kensington to that place.

"What place?" said our young man.

"That place," they said, indicating the paper which, such was his excitement, he had not even looked at.

When he looked at it, although, when in company, he was a young young man of sober deportment, he said: "Good God!" The address was 16 Jasmine Terrace, Poplar. His own address was 22 Jasmine Terrace, Poplar.

For the last twelve months she had been living in his own street. There would be no need for him to battle round the world in quest of beauty. She was in his own street.

Which is where (said old Quong, reaching for the jar of rice-spirit) beauty always lives.

At least (he added, reaching for a glass), so they tell me. But he never saw her beauty again. He married her, and the rest of his life he spent in looking for more advertisement posters.

PANSY PAKENHAM

*The Cook's Room*





## THE COOK'S ROOM

IT was on New Year's Eve that I drove to the Maxwell-Smiths for dinner. When I arrived at Terncote Manor my hostess took me to her bedroom and heartily made me free of the scanty amenities of her dressing-table. She is very fond of animals, and there were several in baskets about the room, so she kept the windows open in spite of the great cold. Nevertheless, there was no fire, as the Maxwell-Smiths are poor and hardy.

As we entered a gust blew the curtains violently inwards, entangling them with the ornaments on a small chest, and a photograph fell to the ground with a crash of broken glass. Mrs. Maxwell-Smith picked it up and laughed good-naturedly, displaying all her big teeth.

"Poor Uncle James! He's always in the wars. This is the third time his photograph has been blown over and broken. He hated draughts in his life, the old wretch. I don't think a window was opened the whole time he lived here."

Shivering before the looking-glass in my black chiffon dinner-dress and dabbing uselessly at my mauve face with a powder-puff, I sympathised with Uncle James, and rather wished he were still alive and owner of Terncote Manor. Not that I had ever visited the house in his day, or even seen him, as he was a complete recluse, and during the last years of his life had never been outside the grounds.

Nobody knew how he occupied himself, though there was a general opinion that he wrote, as great cases of books often

arrived at the station addressed to him. And if he could read he could probably also write—so the neighbours agreed.

However, when he died five years ago and his nephew inherited the estate, no monumental manuscripts came to light—only dozens of detective stories, which must have been his principal purchases. The mystery of his daily life remained unsolved.

“I believe he did nothing but eat,” Mrs. Maxwell-Smith had once confided to me. “The food bills I came across were enormous, and full of the wildest luxuries. But then, of course, he had this marvellous French cook.” She had lowered her voice, and cautiously looked round the room.

I was full of curiosity about the cook. She was a tall thin woman, and though often to be seen marketing in the town was too morose to be approachable. She had come to Terncote soon after Mr. James Maxwell-Smith and had remained there till he died—for twenty-five years, I should think.

At first he had kept a large staff of servants, but gradually they had disappeared till, at the end, the cook remained alone with him in the house. Of course, there were all kinds of scandalous rumours about her in the country-side, but these subsided when it was found that he had left her nothing in his will.

“That was a great relief,” said Mrs. Maxwell-Smith, “as we can hardly make both ends meet as it is. What with food bills and coal bills—and he spent a small fortune on fires—Uncle James left some pretty debts for his heirs to deal with.”

“And what became of the cook?” I had asked.

“Oh! she went back to France, I suppose. To my astonishment she seemed determined to stay on here—absolutely frenzied about it. But I really couldn’t face it, you know. The other servants didn’t like her—she hardly spoke to them, and always insultingly, so they said—and then her cooking—not at all our style of thing—much too extravagant, and my

husband wouldn't have stood it even if we could have afforded it. So I had to give her notice—which I tried to sugar with a bribe, but she treated me with contempt, and left without asking for a reference or anything.

"I suppose she had decided to retire. She probably couldn't bear the idea of a new situation after so many years in the same place, and she is sure to have saved a good sum out of her wages. I think she came from a little town in Normandy, where she could live on a mere pittance. The French are wonderful managers; you know."

Nevertheless Mrs. Maxwell-Smith's brick-red face had grown perplexed and a note of apology had sounded in her voice. I remembered the grim, raw-boned figure of Elise Martineau, her smooth black hair and thin long mouth, and gathered that the business of dismissal must have been unpleasant, even alarming.

However, that was five years ago and nothing had been heard of her since. The dinner to-night certainly could not be suspected of French influence, and the log fires downstairs were amply protected by glass and wire screens from shedding their heat in the large draughty rooms.

The party were all so hearty and talkative that they provided their own radiation and even tried to draw me into their convivial circle. Somehow I could not thaw, physically or mentally. I knew that my hosts had only invited me from a desire to be kind to a middle-aged spinster, and that everyone who spoke to me was filled with a sense of conscious virtue. Besides, as the evening wore on I found myself thinking more and more of Uncle James and identifying my sufferings with his.

How he would have hated the loud, meaningless laughter, the watery brussels sprouts at dinner, the fire screens and the open doors and windows. For ten minutes we stood in the stone-flagged hall while carol-singers were welcomed and

refreshed and the north-east wind blew from the downs around our naked shoulders. No carol-singers would have dared to come to the house in Uncle James's day.

It almost brought tears to my eyes to think of him sitting by a little table near the fire, a detective story at his elbow while the silent Elise brought him course after course of exquisitely-cooked food. And then he had other things to drink besides whisky and port, I felt sure.

As early as was decent I rose to go, my thoughts concentrated on the hot-water bottle and tea-kettle waiting for me ten miles away. Twenty minutes later it became evident that my car would not start that night. With apparent gratitude I resigned myself to the Maxwell-Smiths' hospitality.

"The awful thing is," said my hostess cheerfully, "that all the visitors' rooms are full, but if you don't mind putting up with the big attic for one night we'll do our best to make it habitable."

I said I should love to sleep in the big attic, and after an endless-seeming interval she lighted me up the extra flight of stairs that separated this room from the rest of the house. In the guttering candlelight it certainly looked enormous—partly because it was so low and contained so little furniture. There was a wide iron bedstead at one end protected by a battered screen covered with picture-scraps and heavily varnished.

A small yellow washstand and dressing-table combined leant miserably against a wall—otherwise there was nothing to be seen but old tin trunks, a few moth-eaten rolls of felt, and, right in the far corner, a white marble bust on a brown marble pedestal. As far as I could see it represented a young man with drooping moustaches.

"I really must apologise for this awful room," babbled my hostess. "We have never used it once since Elise Martineau left. It used to be hers—we still call it the cook's room

—but our cook thought it too lonely and refused to sleep in it. So we just keep lumber in it as a rule—such as Uncle James's bust over there."

"So that is your Uncle James," I said, taking my candle to examine the sculpture better. "He looks rather sympathetic."

"Oh! That was done a long time ago, I believe—soon after he first came here. He must have been about thirty-five, but no beauty even then. We didn't feel fond enough of him to keep him in the hall, so after Elise left we banished him to her room, and there he has stayed ever since."

When my hostess had finally said good night I went to look at the marble bust once more. Uncle James had possessed a small, narrow head, delicate features, and a receding chin. His mouth was hidden by a long moustache, and his back was already rounded. I imagined him fair, and that in later life he had worn gold-rimmed spectacles. I rather liked his presence in the cheerless room where the brownish paper was peeling off the walls, and the only signs of comfort were the red baize curtains in front of the dormer windows, and a sheep-skin mat beside the bed. Otherwise the floorboards were bare and worn away in several places.

Once between the sheets I could think of nothing but my absent hot-water bottle. Never had I felt anything so icy touch my skin as those sheets, and I began to look forward to a night of sleepless misery. Moreover, the mattress was such a curious shape. It seemed to have sagged into a great hollow on one side about the level of my shoulders, and the spare pillows were unnaturally dented as well. The extra coldness of these hollows was especially odd—they almost felt like basins of water in the bed.

I tried to keep away from them, but was continually slipping down the slope into their frozen depths. As I grew sleepier this became a sort of nightmare. I seemed to be standing on the steep edge of a pond, and after a while my foot

would slip and I would awake with a start on the brink of destruction. This must have happened four or five times and then I did not wake on the brink, and the black icy waters closed over my head. After the death agony I found myself again in bed, bathed in sweat, yet with a strange icy pressure on my face and shoulders.

For a while I lay quiet, not daring to explore this mystery ; then I timidly put out my hand. It touched something hard, smooth and cold. Like marble, I murmured. An answering murmur came from the thing beside me, something very faint and sad. All at once I no longer felt afraid, but full of pity and curiosity. I ran my hands over the marble, for I was now sure of the material and recognised with the strangest, most melting emotion, the small, narrow head, delicate features and receding chin, then the bowed shoulders and then—nothing. I traced them lightly again and again, and when I knew them by heart lay in a trance of silent expectation.

After a great while the same melancholy murmur reached me, but this time I could distinguish a few words.

“Elise, Elise—after all these years—so cold, so cold—but now . . .”

The sounds died away, and I was swept into oblivion until I awoke and saw the misshapen mattress in daylight. But all the time I was dressing I never looked towards the marble bust, and, of course, I said nothing of the matter to my hosts.

\* \* \* \* \*

A week later a headline in the local paper caught my eye :

GRIM DISCOVERY IN FRENCH TOWN  
CURIOUS LINK WITH TERNCOTE

“The sordid death of an elderly woman in the small Norman town of Bléfort was reported in the French papers yesterday. She was found alone in a garret among signs of extreme poverty, and had left a written message confessing to accelerating her end with poison taken on New Year’s Eve.

"She had lived in complete seclusion since the day, five years ago, when she returned to her native town after half a lifetime spent as a cook in England. She possessed no living friends or relations, and had apparently exhausted her small savings.

"Her name was Elise Martineau, and some Terncote readers will probably recognise the late Mr. James Maxwell-Smith's faithful retainer in the tragic figure of Bléfort."





MRS. VIOLET CAMPBELL

*Lady Harpton's Garden Party*



## LADY HARPTON'S GARDEN PARTY

THE beautiful Mrs. Amersly was lunching alone. She was already dressed, that is, she was dressed for the garden party : for Maud Harpton liked her guests to be in time, even for a charity show, like this one.

Quite often she lunched alone, lately : for Henry had been spending all his mornings with his lawyer, and the train didn't get back from Fellsborough till the afternoon : and, of course, Henry couldn't have the car, since there was only one. She had had to give up far, far too much for Henry as it was.

Mrs. Amersly looked across the dining-room and out into the garden (it was a sight she couldn't keep away from for long, these days) and she seemed to see Henry moving about in it. Moving, as usual, slowly, vaguely, his head on one side in a friendly tilt at the flowers, saying something that no one was listening to. Frankly, Henry was a bore. Always messing about doing things that didn't interest anybody else, that weren't any good at all, and that didn't make any money.

And that was really the trouble. Already it seemed that the house and the garden would have to go. Henry wasn't able to keep it up. But what man with any decent feelings could imagine the beautiful Mrs. Amersly except against a background of gracious luxury ? Yet Henry had actually told her, smiling inanely, that he would have to sell, after all ; that he could find something to do, no doubt ; and that really it might not be so bad in one of those new little houses. Yes, actually that ! Henry understood nothing. Her contempt and her loathing for him sometimes became unbearable.

And it wasn't as if he appreciated *her*. Didn't really care for women at all. Her elegance, her beauty, her charm were wasted on a man who cared only for his own fads. "Saw your beautiful wife the other day, looking more marvellous than ever," someone would say, and he would glance up from some paper he'd be reading, which had not the slightest general interest, and say, "Oh? Ah?" in his fatuous, infuriating way, and blink through his glasses.

But fads he had by the score. Vegetarianism. Herbal baths. Growing expensive and outlandish things in the garden. Fruit and vegetables from here, there and everywhere! Though, really, some justified themselves. These Hungarian lettuces, for instance.

Mrs. Amersly helped herself to another crisp leaf or two. Brilliant emerald, they were, sparkling, tender, and curled in their curious formation of twin rosettes. Henry had been crazy with delight watching them come to perfection: and these were the first the gardener had brought in. Well, they were supremely delicious, certainly. But what was a lettuce, after all? If Henry had thought less of his beautiful lettuce and more of his beautiful wife! . . .

A secret smile sharpened her lips. Henry's weak, pleasant face melted away. At once she saw Kenneth, the adored—his resolute eyes, his thin, straight back. Kenneth, who was so clever, who was forging ahead, who had already made almost a fortune from his latest invention. A manufacturing chemist, Kenneth was, the son of the firm. They had been lovers for two years.

Mrs. Amersly rose suddenly from the table: and once again she looked out on the lawns, still sodden from last night's rain.

The garden was full of birds. What with the bird-boxes that Henry would put up everywhere, as well as their natural nests, the place was overrun with them, picking and pecking everywhere, and filling the whole air with their incessant

chatter. Nothing was safe from their thieving beaks. Every thing, fruit and pod, had to be netted. Of course, it was this that had given them the idea. . . .

But Mrs. Amersly wouldn't think about that. A long, pleasant afternoon lay before her: she was looking her best, quite: no one could guess, as yet: and afterwards—well, why worry?

Lady Harpton had spared no trouble to make her party a success. The grounds of the Court were crowded. The stream of gay parasols rivalled the flower borders. Huge canvas mushrooms flaunted their brave stripes, enshrining roses of completest perfection; sweet peas as big as cabbages; marrows a yard long. On the further slopes the village had gathered in full force for all the customary attractions—the cake weight guessing, the Baby Show, the Dog Show (serious and comic), the Punch and Judy. Dozens of tents and booths dotted the lawns. And, of course, there was one for the palmist.

. . . "I see a long life for ye, me dear, an' many little steps an' stairs, though niver a wan ye don't want! . . . The month of May will bring ye happiness" (any month would, I'm thinkin')—"ah, an' I see a dark man . . . an' a journey over the wather . . . an' a fair woman friend ye mustn't trust . . . an' a parcel, or a letter, maybe, wit a foreign stamp . . . an' a nice surprise awaitin' ye when he gets home!—Next, plase!"

Why shouldn't she go on like this? Patsy O'Flannigan was thinking—easily, comfortably, not bothering much? So long as one didn't do it seriously it was quite pleasant, fortune-telling. She wiped her brow. It was hot in the tent, of course. Still, one had to be somewhere, and one would do anything for her ladyship.

Patsy was Lady Harpton's personal maid. She was, as well, a Character. Her resourcefulness, her obligingness, and her devotion, were as well known in the country as her gift of

second sight. What a boon she had been for years at charity bazaars! Seated placidly in any sort of rigged-up enclosure, she would dispense sixpennyworths of the brightest futures in the pleasantest possible manner, hour after hour; or read hands in which the most satisfactory, though hitherto possibly undiscovered, qualities were discernible; or, if weaknesses, so charming as to be almost desirable in themselves. Sixpences for the Cottage Hospital came tumbling in at the invitation of these self-congratulatory thrills.

But occasionally, and almost as if in spite of herself, Patsy would strike the truth an uncommonly shrewd blow. The reason, of course, was obvious to everyone. She had been "lent" so often, she had seen everybody's hands, she knew the affairs of the whole neighbourhood.

And that was why, this afternoon, Lady Harpton had fixed her up with a sheet in front of her—or rather, two sheets, which hid the interviewer, and allowed only the passage of a pair of hands through the join.

"... an' a letter that ye're expectin' will not bring ye the news ye're looking for... but an unexpected good fortune will befall ye in a *three*... Beware-of-a-tall-man-with-a-dark-moustache-an'-niver-spake-to-a-stranger-on-a-Monday!"

Yes, thought Patsy, as long as nothing touched that inner chord in her mind—why, it was as easy as——

A pair of very white, very slender hands came suddenly through the sheets. They spread themselves out, palm upwards, and remained quite still. Their beauty, their curving elegance, their velvety sheen and brilliant nacre upset Patsy considerably. Why had she come here—a lady, whoever she was? She must have strolled over from the other side where the band played and the gentry had tea. . . .

Patsy took the delicate hands in her strong brown ones, and obediently began her gabble. It wasn't easy. It was incredibly difficult. How could she tell those cultured hands

the usual rigmarole? She bent over them, still talking, feeling uncomfortable. She stopped. She stared at the long crease traversing the pink palm. There was a sort of a star. . . . A blinding flash of indisputable knowledge lighted Patsy's mind. Against her will a little cry escaped her. She bent more closely, the faithful Patsy, and the red surged up through her thick neck.

"Oh, me lady, I must, I *must* warn ye! Ye are in grave, grave danger!—No, no." (The light flickered and sank.) "Someone *near* to ye is in grave danger!—Yet no. It's not that." (The light flared up once more.) "*You* are in very great danger!"

This word, thus thrice repeated, had the strangest effect on the owner of the beautiful hands. At the first sound of it they had started, the fingers spasmodically jerking apart; then a trembling overtook them and they had curled up and clenched into a fist, and all but withdrawn; but at last they had uncurled themselves, gaily, deliberately, and lay open again with a pretty defiance.

A light voice breathed through the screen. "Oh?—When?"

"When?" echoed Patsy stupidly. She stared at the illuminating crease. "I cannot tell ye. I cannot see your face, or guess your age—but, but I should say soon—now—at once! I don't know ye, me lady, an' ye'll pardon me. But I'm warnin' ye! Take care, whatever it is ye're doin', or goin' to do. This danger is not yours only. It is——"

Patsy broke off. A very unpleasant sensation assailed her. If she had had hairs on her spine they would have bristled in fear and hatred.

With a snatch the hands were withdrawn.

Patsy mopped her brow again. This sheet business was unnerving. The smell of the canvas, too, under the hot sun, was close and sickly. She felt deeply troubled. Why hadn't

the easy mood stayed by her? But here, already, was another pair—hard, horny, homely. She took up her tale again.

And the beautiful Mrs. Amersly drifted back, cool as peach-blossom, across the lawn, towards the band, the tea-tent, the well-dressed throng. There was gallant old Eustace Harpton, spruce as ever with his buttonhole, despite his eighty years, battling nobly with his guests.

“Strawberries, Mrs. Amersly?”

Why did the lovely lady turn pale, why did her hand tremble just a little bit? Patsy, with all her second sight, could not have told you.

For Patsy did not reckon to concern herself with the past. And it was the past that was coming up, wave upon wave, chokingly fast and brilliantly clear; and the beautiful Mrs. Amersly walked away and sat down alone on a garden seat; and it was as if all the emotions and events of the last few weeks rose before her in one confused, composite picture.

She saw herself talking to Kenneth, alone in the dark, under the lime-trees, by the strawberry beds. It was Kenneth who had first had the idea. No amateurish stupidities for him, he had said. The only crimes one hears of are those that are bungled: whereas those that are neatly, successfully accomplished——

And, of course, for a scientific man like himself means were possible which others would not know of. She was to trust him. Do just what he said, and trust him. Look natural, behave ordinarily, wait patiently, and heaven would release them—yes, almost literally, heaven—would remove for them the obstacle in their path.

After that it had seemed quite simple.

She had only had to send him the strawberry-netting, privately, to his works.

And there Kenneth had treated it with an invention of his own. He wouldn't tell her its ingredients. It was similar to



a dye, was all he said. You know how the dye runs off the nets, and colours your hands if you handle them after rainy weather? Well, this would run in the same way: during rain it would be washed on to the strawberries. And it was an absolutely deadly poison. Nothing, said Kenneth, short of boiling the fruit—which no one does, anyway—could destroy its power.

And the maids never touched Henry's precious strawberries: and she herself could make some excuse to avoid them. Afterwards—well, say there was a sentimental prejudice. Say anything—it wouldn't matter then. It was all worked out, oh, so carefully! No room for error in those keen eyes, steel-grey: in the microscopes, the test-tubes, the acids and elements, all the chemist's paraphernalia! For—and this, Kenneth had said, was the crown of the whole thing—the effect of his tasteless, colourless chemical was a natural one upon the heart. Syncope, collapse. So that the inquest (they'd have to face an inquest) would disclose heart-failure.

Altogether simple and straightforward! Many people have groggy hearts without knowing it. All one had to do was to wait, he'd said: one of these days the drought would break, and there would be a long, deep, heavy shower. . . And all last night this was what she had heard—the rain from Heaven, coming down. The strawberries, and the netting, and everything in the garden, had been soaked. . . .

No hitch anywhere. Not even the feared difficulty of sending off the netting without the knowledge of Robin, the old gardener, the tyrant. For Robin had cut his leg, scything, had been laid up for weeks. The new one was a little inexperienced, a little stupid. "Just about stupid *enough*," Kenneth had said judicially. "Won't remember too well: *in case*. But, of course, there's no danger!"

Yes, that's what he'd said. No danger. It was the rock

she'd clung to, all these last weeks. Why had that woman dared to contradict him? Naturally, Kenneth knew best!

How confused one's thought were becoming. No sequence. No control. It was just half-past four. Henry would be having those strawberries quite soon, now. She had told the new man to pick some to-day: master would like them for tea.

Henry never went to garden-parties. How tiresome of him. He said he hadn't a decent suit; he said he couldn't stand poodle-faking. Well, this would be a lesson to him! So he was having tea alone. Kenneth had said it would be better if she wasn't there. And, of course, it had turned out miraculously, Maud's party the first day after the rain. Perhaps Henry was biting one now, and blinking. How she loathed the very thought of him, of his weak smile, of being tied to him——

A sort of faintness flowed over her. "*You are in grave, grave danger!*" Why had she gone to that idiotic palmist? Nobody believed these things—it was only because she had felt so queer, so strung-up, so nervous. Felt she *must* know. Yet all she had learned was——

Henry would be feeling queer, too, now. He would be choking, perhaps, ringing the bell, asking for water, heaven knows what——

"*Water!*" cried Mrs. Amersly aloud, to her own surprise. She felt a burning sensation from head to foot. No one heard her in her retreat. "Now his breath will be going," she said to herself. Her heart began to pound unbearably. She felt almost as if her own breath was going, too, at the same time. "Hell!" said the lovely lady. "I *must* control myself! Kenneth said: 'Be natural, be ordinary,' there is no danger."

She gave a little sigh, the beautiful Mrs. Amersly, her hands fluttered to her heart: the colour drained slowly from her face: quite gently she collapsed sideways on the seat under

the trees. Like a flower she lay there : a handful of peach-blossom, fallen to the ground.

Shouts. Commotion. Doctors.

But it was poor Patsy O'Flannigan one pitied most. "God help me !" she wailed, over and over, for weeks, and would not be comforted. "I'll niver tell fortunes again ! Niver ! Whatever could have possessed me, heaven forgive me, to be sayin' a thing like that ? Wasn't it enough to startle a poor young lady out of her wits ? And it is so hot, and she, as the doctors say now, with a little one comin' ? Whoever could have guessed she had a weak heart, the sweet, pretty, innocent crachure !"

Yes, it was the beautiful Mrs. Amersly who died of heart-failure at Lady Harpton's garden party.

You see, by mistake, the stupid new gardener had put the strawberry-netting over the Hungarian lettuces.



L. BIRO

*Doctors*



## DOCTORS

IT was a quarter past two on a hot September afternoon. The Town Clerk rose from the table.

"I must be going," he said.

"Well, just one more glass," insisted the host.

The Town Clerk emptied another glass of the ice-cooled wine. Beads of perspiration appeared on his brow; he wiped them off, shook hands with the others and left. Immediately afterwards he was followed by the two doctors—the white-haired, good old doctor and his pedantic nephew whom the old man was just then initiating into the fine shades and points of the Kúnszállás practice.

There remained at the table only Funták, the host. The table was strewn all over with cards and wine glasses. The sunshine was blinding. Funták suffered terribly from the heat and he reached for the wine-bottle. At that moment the rotund, blonde Mrs. Funták appeared in the frame of the garden gate and slowly approached the small arbour.

By the time she had got there Funták was lying on the ground. There he lay groaning faintly, his face purple coloured. The woman uttered a shrill cry, bent over him, tried to lift him and then gave way to desperate and prolonged screaming. For half a minute she screamed there, forsaken in the sun-swept garden, until at length the servants, awakening from their summer midday drowsiness, ran to her assistance. The woman had her husband lifted and carried into the cool house by the coachman, the gardener and the odd job

man, and she made the maid run post-haste after the two doctors.

Funták was quietly groaning in the cool room. The woman tried in a helpless way to comfort him, and then presently the two doctors entered the room. The younger one hurried into the room in a state of great agitation and with much ado, and with an air of self-importance; the older one, white in the face, and without a sound. The woman hastened to meet them; she was unable to utter a word, her mouth was wide open, her eyes glassily staring into some deadly terror, but all she could do was to point distractedly with her hand in the direction of the bed.

The two doctors went up to the bed. The younger man launched into a rapid and exhaustive examination, whilst the older one, his white eyebrows knitted, motionless and in silence, watched the man in agony.

The younger man looked up and regarded his uncle. He was about to speak, but his uncle motioned him into silence. The young doctor was struck dumb, but his whole body, his head, his face and his hand continued to indicate that he had something of the utmost importance to tell. The older one signalled to him with a nod of his head that he knew all about it. He turned to the woman.

"I am afraid Paul's condition must give cause for grave anxiety," he said, "but we mustn't get alarmed."

Thereupon the woman gave vent to such screams of despondent terror that the old doctor was completely taken aback and once more turned pallid. He tried to calm her; he took her by the arm and led her outside. She yielded to him, but only as far as the next room and there she violently threw herself down and, without uttering a word, kept hitting her head against the floor. The old doctor motioned his nephew to himself.

"You stay in there," he said, "and permit nobody to enter."



"It will be all over in ten minutes."

"I know."

The old man shut the door behind himself and for a few seconds beheld in deep contemplation the woman writhing on the floor. At length he went close to her, took hold of her arm, clutched hold of her and forced her upon her feet.

"Look at me," he shouted at her.

The woman stared at him vacantly and slowly her eyes began to darken. The doctor shouted at her :

"Don't faint ! "

He shook her. He again mustered all his strength and shook her. The woman uttered a hissing sound of pain and the veil of swooning vanished from before her eyes. The doctor now bent down to her benignly and tenderly.

"What is it you wish to say ?" he asked her gently in a low voice.

The woman moaned and sobbed. She started to speak but overcome with a feeling of shame even in her swooning fits, she broke off in a state of bewilderment. The doctor prompted her like a child. And in a failing voice, overcome by shame, groaning, but still in a whisper, she burst it out to him quickly amidst her tears :

"We weren't married."

The doctor raised his head, and, pursing his lips, without a word he nodded slowly. Now he understood everything. He let go of the woman : she fell headlong and in agony kept quietly screaming at the floor.

The doctor eyed her and now understood everything that he had hitherto merely surmised hazily and what a few minutes ago had been turned into uncertain and groping suspicion by that inexplicable and inordinate despondency. A secret kept over a period of fifteen years . . . a cooled-down love affair . . . a liaison grown used to . . . the man too leisurely and the woman not tenacious enough . . . and

both feeling ashamed about it . . . She was a divorced woman ; her children were born long before they moved into this town ; they were ashamed to have them legalised. The terror of shame. The fear of small-town ostracism.

Deeply moved and meditating, the doctor looked at the woman writhing in agony on the floor. The legal heirs were sure now to eject her from the house ; distant and very voracious relations were certain to make their appearance ; she and her children were going to be deprived of their home ; and from a state of well-being she and her three children would be thrust on to the road of slow starvation.

He turned round rapidly, went to the table, tore out a page from his notebook, wrote a few words on it, called in a servant and sent him off with the note.

He hurried across into the other room. The young doctor turned towards him. The old man went up to the windows and drew in the shutters. The cool room became darkened. The young doctor looked at his uncle with alarm and aggravation and attempted to speak, but the old one anticipated him.

"The Town Clerk will be here in a moment," he said. "He is going to marry them."

The young man looked at him in amazement. The old one pointed at the dying man.

"He told me a short while ago," he said calmly, "of his desire to marry legally, on his dying bed, the mother of his children."

The young doctor was about to reply in vexation, but then merely shrugged his shoulders.

"He won't last another two minutes," he said, pointing at the dying man. "He can't live long enough to do that. . . . If it were not for the dark we could see."

The old doctor made an energetic motion with his hand. "He is going to live long enough for that," he said firmly.

"Please try," replied the young doctor.

He gave his seat to his uncle and watched sneeringly to see what the old doctor would do. But the old man merely stopped beside the bed and did nothing. He watched silently and without a stir the dark and uncertain outlines of the dying man.

The young man intended to say something, but at that very moment he appeared to have noticed something. He bent over the bed and said in a low voice :

"It's all over."

The old doctor shook his head.

"He is dead," repeated the young man impatiently. He was about to make for the window, but the firm and sharp voice of his uncle made him stop.

"No."

The young man looked at him dumbfounded. He had never before heard him speak in such a voice. The old man then turned face to face with him and placed his hands upon his shoulders. His gaunt, fine hands were now firm and heavy.

"He is not dead," he said in a quiet, but coldly firm voice, "and we are going to be the witnesses to his marriage."

The young man angrily tried to free himself from the hands of his uncle, but the old man's grip did not loosen. He held him tightly and forced him into calmness.

"We are going to be the witnesses," he repeated firmly, articulating his words. The young man excitedly tried to protest, but from beneath his white knitted eyebrows the old man stared into his eyes with a relentless, commanding and cold look. For some time the young man stood this stare and at length tried to burst out turbulently. This intense, silent struggle lasted for about half a minute and in the end the young man surrendered.

"I am not . . ."

He was unable to continue. These were his first words in the silent struggle and they were also his last. He fell into silence and cast his eyes to the floor. It was only then that the old doctor loosened his grip.

The young man sank dazed into a chair ; the old man, too, sat down. The slipping of the chairs was the last sound and then profound silence ensued.

At length the waiting became unbearable. To the young man it seemed as if they had been sitting there for hours in darkness and stillness. Presently, however, voices became audible from outside. The old doctor rose and opened the door. It was the Town Clerk who had just arrived.

The old doctor hastened to him.

"Our friend Paul," he said, in a low voice, "expressed to me the desire to marry the mother of his children. As his condition gives cause for anxiety, I should be glad if you would kindly perform the necessary ceremony right away."

The woman threw up her head amidst alarmed panting. The old doctor went to her, took her arm, and steadied her to her feet. She yielded to him in a state of trembling and stupor. He led her into the dark room. With dimmed eyes and shuddering, the woman stopped and stared, bent in the direction of the dark bed. Slowly the Town Clerk followed them into the room, groping his way carefully towards the table. The old doctor took his hand, led him to the table and made him sit down on a chair.

"The shutters, please," whispered the Town Clerk.

The old doctor went to the windows and touched the shutters. A narrow streak of light streamed into the room, throwing a dim light upon the table, but leaving the bed in semi-darkness. The doctor then went back to the Town Clerk and noticed that the latter also paled as a result of a suddenly awakened doubt and from a tormenting suspicion. He bent down to him.

The Town Clerk looked with misgiving and alarm in the direction of the bed ; the doctor placed his hand on his shoulder ; the Town Clerk looked up at him in anguish and with chattering teeth asked him in a low voice :

“Are you sure that he is . . . ?”

The doctor did not wait until he finished his sentence. He interrupted him :

“I am positive of it,” he replied firmly. He glared with a flashing and commanding look into the Town Clerk’s eyes. The Town Clerk bowed his head and then commenced the ceremony in a rapid voice :

“Are the parties, desirous of getting married, in a position to state that there is no reason why they should not become legally wedded to each other ?”

The woman stared at him with a vacant look. The doctor went close to her and touched her lightly.

“Answer him,” he said. “Tell him ‘Yes.’”

“Yes,” said the woman, perplexed.

“In that case,” babbled the Town Clerk, “in view of the exceptional circumstances . . .”

He went on babbling. With his head bent and his eyes fixed upon the table he cited articles of law. The old doctor stepped close to the bed. The Town Clerk asked in a babble :

“Do you declare, Paul Funták, that . . . you want . . .”

The question was whether Paul Funták declared that he wanted to take the present Barbara Rozvány for his lawful wedded wife. From the direction of the bed a very faint and hardly audible “Yes” was heard. The Town Clerk thereupon turned rapidly and alarmed to the woman :

“Do you declare, Barbara Rozvány . . . ?”

Perplexed and dazed, the woman whispered her “Yes.” The Town Clerk continued to babble, declaring them to be husband and wife, and then he rose to his feet. The old doctor went up to him.

"I thank you," he said quietly. "You two leave the room now and we two are going to try our utmost . . ."

The Town Clerk fled from the room. Listlessly the woman allowed herself to be pushed out of the room. And once again the two doctors were there alone in the room. The old man sat down. The young man was unable to sit down. Shuddering and excited, he stood in a corner. Seconds. Minutes. Eternity.

The room was still and dark. The young man stealthily left the room. The old man sat on his chair, and in the cool semi-darkness he looked at the dead. For about half an hour he sat thus, facing the dead ; he wanted at least half an hour to elapse ; then he got up and went across into the other room.

"He's dead," he said calmly.

Loud sobbing, hitherto suppressed, burst forth from the woman's lips ; the doctor addressed to her a few comforting words, gently stroked her, and then he left. Slowly he walked out into the courtyard ; the courtyard and the garden were bathed in blinding September sunshine. It was three o'clock in the afternoon.

LORD DUNSANY

*A Drink from a Running Stream*





## A DRINK FROM A RUNNING STREAM

WE were debating one day at the club what was the best drink. One said vermouth because it was good for the liver, another said gin because it was good for the lights, and almost every drink was mentioned in turn, till one wondered how human organs kept working at all where alcohol was not to be had in abundance.

And then Jorkens joined in with the remark : "The best drink I ever had in my life was out of a running stream."

A silence fell at that. It was not so much the staleness of the story that depressed us as the feeling that, excellent as its moral was, Jorkens was not quite the man to tell it. We didn't mind tales that had been told before ; one often has to put up with that at a club, and does so quite readily ; but it jarred on the feelings of men to whom a tumbler of whisky was nothing, to hear that tale, so intimately associated with the memory of gentle governesses, told by a man like Jorkens.

We said : "Was it really ?" or : "Yes, I suppose it was," and turned quickly to other topics. But Malden, who will never let Jorkens alone, probably welcomed the idea of letting him make a fool of himself ; he consequently leaned forward, all politeness, and begged Jorkens to tell us the story. After that, of course, there was no stopping it, and we had to sit and listen.

"Yes," said Jorkens, "a drink out of a running stream."

"And muddy water, I suppose," said Malden, for that's the form the story usually takes.

"No," said Jorkens. "No, it wasn't muddy. Clear, clear as a crystal. I'll tell you how it happened. It was when I was in Canada, just after the War, in the fall of 1919. It's gorgeous there in the fall; the leaves of the oak trees glow like embers, and the maple standing amongst them, or out in the fields by itself, shines like a lonely flame. I know nothing in nature more like a flame than a maple. I was there looking for a job of some sort, being slightly low in funds; and I knew nobody, except Jiggers, Lord Ludd's Dun as he is now; it's the old spelling of London, of course. And he was no good to me then; he was as broke as myself. He had some trifling job with one of the biggest Canadian distillers, but it only barely kept body and soul together. Yes, if you'd asked Lord Ludd's Dun to lend you a fiver in those days he'd merely have turned round and borrowed ten cents off you. Well, he and I were out for a walk one day along the American border, and I said that something ought to be able to be done to get a few bottles of whisky over. And he looked at the frontier with the gaze of a man seeing farther than me, and said nothing. And somehow or other I never fathomed that mind at the time—consummate power is not always immediately recognised—and I said to him: 'Surely a frontier like that, four thousand miles without a fort, ought to have its uses.' And I remember his words to this day. 'Uses!' he said. 'Why, it's sent by Heaven.'

"'Well,' I said, 'you can get a few bottles of pink-and-blue (that's the silly name they called their whisky), and I don't mind trying to get it across to the States. They want it over there. And we'll go fifty-fifty.'

"I'll never forget his quiet look of contempt. He was almost starving, and yet he didn't want to handle anything like a dozen of whisky. In those days, just as now, he seemed only able to see things if they ran into hundreds of millions. And as a result he very nearly starved.

“ ‘Well, why not ?’ I said to him.

“ ‘Oh, yes,’ he said in a tired voice, as though the price of a dinner every day for a fortnight were so trifling a matter that he’d sooner go without dinner ; as he very often did.

“Well, then I began to explain my theories to him, for you can’t do any piece of work without some idea to start on. What I said was that we’d think of various ways of concealing the whisky, but that we wouldn’t act on the first bright idea that came into our heads, like common smugglers ; we’d smuggle water first, or milk ; and whatever got through most easily and often we would try again with the whisky. A good idea, too. But he just listened moodily and said : ‘All right.’

“Well, he got the dozen of pink-and-blue, and I got lots of bright ideas and tried them out with water as we had arranged. And the odd thing was that the really bright ideas all got found out. The American preventive people seemed to have been doing some thinking, too. But they couldn’t do anything to me for smuggling water. And one or two quite simple little devices got through as easily as possible.

“Well, I got my dozen of whisky through quite comfortably, and came back for some more, and gave Jiggers his half-share. I didn’t know what a great man he was in those days, but I couldn’t help being awed by the look that I often saw on his face. It was the look of a master musician about to play, the look of a Napoleon before his Austerlitz, the look of a statesman about to explain away something that to common people is merely a fact. And he was very thin in those days owing to want of food, and that added to his expression a force that was almost a terror. You know him by sight, of course ; he’s dark and he’s aquiline still, seen side-face, in spite of his fat. But in those days he was like a brooding eagle. An eagle on a high place watching lambs.

“Well, he took his share of the money, and got me another dozen ; but he wouldn’t say thank you for what I’d done or

talk about what I was going to do. He was moodier than ever, and his mind was far away from my whisky.

"So I went back through the border with my pink-and-blue as soon as Jiggers was able to let me have it.

"I won't say how I got it through, for that's not in the private interest : some other man will be working my scheme now, and I won't give him away. It's sufficient to say that filling all the hollow parts of the frame of a bicycle with whisky won't do at all ; they found it out as soon as I tried it with water. 'What's all that ?' they asked. 'That's a Canadian Hydraulic,' I said.

"When you have to talk nonsense for any reason, you must talk the kind of nonsense they are accustomed to, and they'll accept it as they accept an advertisement.

"Well, I got my whisky through, and I was wandering about in the woods on my way back, looking at the glory of the fall, and suffering raging thirst, for I couldn't afford to drink any of the whisky. The sun so late in the year was shining quite warmly through the glittering leaves, adding to the pangs of my thirst, and I was getting near to the point when men drink water. Perhaps I should have done so there and then from a rocky stream in the wood, only that stream was dry ; so I buoyed myself up with the hope that barely a mile across the Canadian border, now only a few yards away, was a dear old soul who was often good for a drink. I'd worked pretty hard, and it meant a lot of walking ; and Jiggers seemed to think it was all too trifling to thank me for ; that's the way with all great men towards everybody who is off the direct road that they think destiny's beaten for them.

"I sat down on the bank of the stream to rest before going back into Canada. I must have walked fifteen miles before I disposed of the whisky and another eight after that. I sat down in a heap. The stream was oddly dry ; even the pools that lie in the hollows of rocks in almost any dry watercourse

seemed to have all evaporated. But sitting there on the bank the sun got me through the pink and golden leaves, and, late in the year though it was, I couldn't bear even the slightest aggravation of the raging thirst that had been made all the acuter by carrying whisky that I couldn't afford to touch. Because, you see, it was like raw gold to the Americans. Their Dry Law was quite new and they were just feeling the sting of it.

"So I climbed down into the water-course and made myself comfortable against a good smooth boulder under the shade of the bank that was on the side of the sun. And there I sat thinking about the Dry Law, trying to make out whether it was good or not, and wondering if I could utilise it further, so as to earn a steady livelihood. My thoughts took a hopeful turn in this direction, and they and the rest in the shade were so gently soothing that I must have almost fallen asleep, when I suddenly heard a murmur. I may have been quite asleep, but I was on my feet at once. No one who has travelled about the world a bit, as I have done, can mistake that murmur. It's not difficult to recognise, but you must recognise it at once if you're sitting, as I was, in the bed of a dried water-course. It is death to stop and wonder if it is really the sound that you thought it was.

"It was the sound of a torrent coming round the corner, a little way off in the wood. The banks were singularly steep and regular and it was not as easy to get out of the water-course as it had been to get down, but I did it, and just in time ; and the torrent went by me like a tiger. No, I wasn't dreaming. The thought occurred to me for an instant that I might be, when I saw the tiger-coloured torrent, more golden than the sun. But I was wide awake, standing there watching it flashing in the sunlight, and foaming over the rocks. "Spell-bound " is, I suppose, the word ; but whatever it was I stood motionless. Motionless I remained perhaps for minutes, while

that torrent went glistening by. And all of a sudden I realised that I was wasting moments of opportunity that in all my life were unlikely to come again. Very unlikely. And I ran to a place from which I could reach it easily, and got down on my hands and knees and had a drink. And from the moment my lips touched it I could tell that it was pre-War."

"Pre-War water?" said Malden.

"Whisky," said Jorkens. "If you underrate the abilities of Ludd's Dun you'll be making a great mistake. That was probably his first scheme—the first we know about, anyway—planned by him, worked out by him, and carried through by him in every detail. And, as is perhaps the case with most great men, his earliest conception was his greatest. Nothing daunted him, nothing turned him aside. Instead of asking if it had been done before, its novelty was probably what attracted him most; instead of asking if it could be done at all, he did it. Of the whole scheme he spoke to never a soul. The distiller knew that he wanted an incredible amount of whisky for the States, and compelled by the giant size of the man's personality he relied upon him to get it through, and supplied it. But he never knew how it was to be done. Of course it made his fortune too.

"Others dammed the stream inside the Canadian border, but they never knew what they were working for, except treble wages, to be paid in a week.

"Another man scooped the water out of the rock-hollows, for fear of contaminating the whisky, but he never knew what was to come down that watercourse when all the water was safely out of the way. And further down in the wood there were tanks all ready and thousands of casks. One man there must have known, but that man was Porvis, who is Ludd's Dun's secretary to-day, a man who never speaks a word, at any rate, not of Ludd's Dun's business.

"And all these things were only financed by the certainty

which that tremendous personality enforced upon every mind, that this vast enterprise was bound to prosper. For ready money, the cash I brought him for the first dozen of whisky, must have been about all he had. And little he remembers of that to-day.

“And in the end how simple are almost all great enterprises! Merely, ninety per cent of them, recognising some urgent need among men, and then going and satisfying it. Jiggers stood like Cortez upon the boundary of the Sahara. . . . Well, whoever did first discover the Sahara. He stood there and saw a nation panting for drink. Others had seen that much, but what did Jiggers do? He gave it to them. And that torrent went amongst them and disappeared, as a rivulet in the desert.

“Yes, I was present at the foundation of Ludd’s Dun’s fortunes. And little enough I got out of it.

“Yes, after all, I got the drink of a lifetime.

“Thanks, I will.”





ELIZABETH IRONS FOLSOM

*Towers of Fame*



## TOWERS OF FAME

HE raised his voice to bar interruption. "You cannot tell anything about anyone. Romance survives where you least expect it. Would you look for it in Eric Hall, for instance? Would you suspect him of Romance?"

"Well, hardly," said one of the listeners. "Not that calculating, cold man—all indifference. Just to make your point, don't try to prove that *he* has known sentiment."

"More than most men," replied Kent. "I have a notion to tell you about him. I *will* tell you. Come closer, Janet—all of you—to hear the unbelievable."

"About Judge Eric Hall, who knows only power—fame!" They laughed.

"Yes, about him."

"How do you happen to know?"

"He told me."

"Did he expect you to tell?"

"Heaven knows what a man expects when he babbles."

Dinner was over; coffee was being served in the big, candle-lit drawing-room. The guests had made little intimate groups; someone at the piano at the far-end of the room touched half-strains between talk and laughter. The group in the deep window drew closer to Kent, and made themselves comfortable.

"'Babbles' is what I said," went on the speaker, rolling a cigarette with deliberation, "but that is the wrong word.

We were old friends : in fact, I was responsible for the whole thing, for I had talked about the queer town in one of the Middle Western states. Eric is the kind who always wants to know, so when he happened to be in that part of the state, he hired a car and drove out to see for himself."

"I've heard of that town," declared Janet eagerly. "There is no other like it, is there?"

Kent passed over the question.

"I'll tell it exactly as he told me. I'm sure I can. I could not forget it. He had driven ten miles through dust and wind with a thunderstorm rolling up ahead of him—purple storm with a green fringe on it—the kind they have out there. He was whacking along when he caught sight of a sign by the roadside. He stopped and backed his car to read it. It said—I remember it exactly—it said :

SMOKING, DRINKING, PROFANITY, FORBIDDEN AS YOU  
PASS THROUGH THIS TOWN.

YOU HAVE NO RIGHT TO POLLUTE THE AIR.

MOST PEOPLE ARE BAD. MOST PEOPLE LIE, STEAL AND  
DRINK.

"Oh ! Truly !" gasped Janet.

"It was what Eric was looking for—the entrance to the town of fanatics. There was a blank-looking group of houses marked at intervals by tall, white board signs—black letters on a white ground. He drove slowly. It was Sunday and the stillness was absolute. There was a building that might be an hotel—on the veranda were vacant chairs tilted against the rail ; a few shops, grey with closed doors ; houses grey, too, all with doors shut tight, curtains made to screen. The main street, three or four blocks long, was deserted. At a far corner a man appeared, took a look at the coming car, and stepped out of sight. A woman who came out on her porch, slipped back, and shut the door sharply. She was grey, too—

clothes and hair ; the distant man had seemed grey—a brown-grey, like the dust that whirled.

“He stopped the car again to read another sign, this one as large as a house front, full of preachments, repeating the words that he had first read :

MOST PEOPLE ARE BAD, THEY LIE, STEAL, AND DRINK.

NO OUTSIDE PEOPLE OR INSTITUTIONS WANTED HERE.

THE DANCE IS OF THE DEVIL, THE THEATRES ARE DEVIL-BEGOTTEN.

“And again :

MOST PEOPLE ARE BAD. THEY LIE, STEAL, AND DRINK.

“As he stood reading, he was conscious that men had appeared in the streets ahead and behind him. They fitted the houses—brown-grey, closed, shut tight. They walked slowly, eyes on the ground, but, as they passed him, he had a look from each. The looks were alike : ominous—hate snapped out at him from under briefly raised lids. Each face had a set mouth, with slashes down from its corners. Each head that turned slightly had—menace—hostile promises.

“The storm was breaking : a flash of lightning swept down the street ; thunder crashed ; for a moment the wind ceased—it hung aloof and the calm was thick with the brown-grey of the town—with deep silence. A desert plain, a skiff alone on the ocean, would have been more friendly, he said.”

“Where is the Romance ?” someone asked, as Kent stopped.

“It’s at hand. It crossed the street in front of his car just as the wind came tearing like a railroad train. He saw her face for an instant before it caught her. Well, folks—I can’t tell you how Eric spoke of her face. He forgot that he had ever seen a court-room or a law office, or had known indifference or ambition. He said to me—I can see him as he rapped the table and forgot he was speaking—‘ The face of that girl,

Kent!’ And—can you believe it of Eric?—he went on : ‘Do you remember Raphael’s peasant girl? The one with parted lips and queer, asking eyes? She was exactly like her. The wind took her sunbonnet away. She had two long braids of hair. She stopped and stared at me, her long, brown-grey skirt twisting about her little flat shoes. Then she ran on, clutching her braids, and a near door slammed after her.’

“The wind was on then ; the few trees bent before it.

“The rain was close. There was no protection and, acting on impulse, he drove the car back of the huge sign. It was a shield from the wind and a slight protection against the slanting rain.

“Eric said it had been years since he had seen a Western storm, where it lets loose and whoops ’er up. He was half-blinded with the lightning ; he could hear the smash of small buildings ; the rattling scurry of debris blown by the wind. His own shelter shivered, creaked. It was braced strongly from the back, but he thought it more than likely that it would go. Across the street he heard one go down with a splitting thud.

“But as he waited, he was conscious, he said, only of the girl who was somewhere in that strange town. I’d like to have had you—you people who think you know Eric—watch him as he told me this. There was not a drop of blood in his body, to judge from the colour of his face ; his fingers twitched. He talked because he had to talk to someone, I guess. He was not self-sufficient just then.”

“Hm-m,” said someone. “I don’t get him in the role, and still I do, too, in a way : the force in him could be applied as well to an—er—infatuation as to anything else. I suppose it *was* an infatuation, eh, Kent? They are strange things, but they wear off.”

“Go on,” said Janet.

“He said that he sat there in the car while the wind bent

his board protection and the rain came in sheets. He was wet through from the spray where it struck the outer edge of the car. He sat and watched pictures of that girl's face: they came through the rain; came into the lightning; came everywhere. He was half-conscious, he said, absorbed in the new thing.

"Out of that state of mind—he told a lot about that: it seemed to puzzle him as it does us now—he was startled by a new gale of wind, a close splitting of boards, the shriek of wood parting from wood at his elbow; and then the whole great shield tottered, swayed, resisted, swayed again, and came down over him. He ducked his head. A moment later he discovered that, in falling, the sign had gone into some trees standing close and was held there, in half-tent fashion, so that it protected him from the rain. Then he saw, too, someone clinging to the slanting edge of the shield. He leaped from the car and caught her as she fell.

"Her clothes were dripping with water; there was a trickle of blood down one cheek. But she was not unconscious and she struggled in his arms. He made her sit down on the running board of the car. Then he asked if she was hurt and she shook her head. He asked her how she happened to be there back of the sign and she shook her head again. He sat down beside her and watched her. He spoke to me about 'filling his eyes with her for the rest of his life'—and other things that Eric would not have said normally—or if he had not been—er—infatuated. That was the word, wasn't it?

"They sat there a long time without speaking, and she kept her eyes closed. The wind died away, but the rain persisted—a steady downpour; the green-grey of the storm daylight changed into the black-grey of steady rain. He waited.

"When she opened her eyes, he asked again how she happened to be there. After much urging she answered him.

" 'They turned me out of the house,' she said.

“‘Turned you out!’ he repeated, incredulously. ‘In this storm! From your home! Why? What had you done?’

“‘I had stopped and looked at you,’ she answered simply.

“‘What?’ Eric put force into the word when he spoke it.

“‘I had looked at you. Stopped and looked. It was a sin. After that, I could not be allowed to live with those who were not sinners,’ she explained.

“‘I never heard of such a thing!’ he told her. ‘Are they crazy?’

“‘The signs tell you. It is their belief. It was a sin to have looked at you—and remembered.’

“Eric’s blood was racing; she had remembered! Looked at him, and remembered.

“‘Don’t worry. Just tell me,’ he urged.

“She told him. He did not tell me just what she said, but I could guess as I watched the light back in his eyes. Her father had opened the door and put her out in the rain as a wanton. He was very strict—father. As soon as the rain was over she would go to the other end of the town where she had a friend who would take her in. No, she did not believe as her father and the people of the town believed; her mother had taken her away and she had been brought up differently, but when the mother had died, he had brought her back.

“‘My mother could not bear it here,’ she said. ‘I am not so brave as she, or I would go.’”

“Go on,” said Janet again.

“It’s a good story, isn’t it? Especially since we have our own opinions concerning him. No king of lovers, no Romeo, no schoolboy, could have told such a tale of first love as Eric told me. Spilled it out. Words tumbling over each other.

“In one look, in one half-hour, it seemed, he had turned over all the principles upon which we live here in New York. The primal had taken him—and her, too. She was not afraid; not frightened at what she must have seen in him.



“‘And why, when he turned you out, did you come in here?’ he asked finally.

“He had never before listened for an answer as he listened for that one.

“‘I came because you were here,’ she said.

“Well, people—I began to see then what he was up against in the way of intoxication. He had not touched her; it had been all very aloof, but when she told him why she had come, he said he would have been wooden if he had not gathered her close and held her tight.

“Then, through the slackening rainfall, he heard footsteps outside their shelter, heard them on the soft ground close by, saw a stooped figure straighten under their tipped roof. It was one of the all-alike, brown-grey men with jammed-shut mouth and slashes down from it; with hate-filled eyes.

“This man levelled his finger at Eric. ‘Now ye kin have her,’ he said harshly. ‘Ye kin take her along o’ ye. There’s no door open in this town for such as her. They’re shut against her for ever. This is no place for her ever again. We’re done. All o’ us.’

“She sprang forward. ‘Father!’ she cried.

“He struck her with his open hand straight across the mouth.

“‘Harlot! Plaything o’ strange men!’ he accused, scornfully.

“Eric said that he reached for the man, but that she spread her arms between them.

“‘No!’ she exclaimed. ‘He believes it! He cannot help it. No, no!’

“The man did not speak again. He stooped under the slanting boards and went away.

“And now comes what Eric says was the strangest part of it—the way he took it. Back of the glamour of the girl’s lovely face; back of the pull of her, standing there in the

slackening rain holding her wet skirts about her, her neck bare ; back of the wonder of her, there rose a bank of his sane self—that self indifferent to all else. There towered a steeple of his future as he had planned it ; of his ambitions ; of his wealth and fame which were just beginning and for which he had worked hard. They grew—these steeples—and pushed closer. The girl watched him.

“She had not spoken to him since her father had gone away ; she had stood aside while Eric got the car out upon the road ; she had followed him to it and stood there clasping her bare elbows—lips parted like the Raphael girl-child, he said. She was oblivious to watchers behind drawn curtains.

“ ‘Now what shall you do ?’ he asked her. ‘Does he mean it ?’

“ ‘Yes, he means it. I shall walk to the next town. There will be something for me to do there.’

“ ‘I’m sorry——’ he began, all the steeples crowding around him.

“ ‘Don’t be. I’m glad. It gives me a chance to be brave as she was.’

“She put up one hand to her mouth and pressed her lips tight with it.

“ ‘It’s odd, isn’t it ?’ she asked.

“He says he did not need to ask what was odd. He knew. It was the sudden new thing which was his—and hers. But the steeples were nearer. And a free life was what he had planned ; it alone could bring him what he wanted. But he asked :

“ ‘Will you come with me, as he said ?’

“ ‘Oh, no. I am not your kind.’

“ ‘But I love you,’ he told her then. You should have heard him speak those three words, the day he told me the story. Another man surely—not the Eric we know. He said it twice : ‘I love you.’

“ ‘And I you,’ the girl replied.

“ ‘Then come with me,’ he pleaded.

“ ‘No. It will pass. It cannot be the real thing. It was too quick for that.’

“She smiled and he tried to laugh and say, without too much earnestness :

“ ‘Shall I come back some day ? ’ ”

“She shook her head again.

“ ‘Please don’t.’

“He climbed slowly into the car, legs weighted, he said. He looked back as he gathered speed on the hard road. She was walking too slowly it seemed to him—her head too low—

“But everywhere were the steeples of fame and fortune to come if he were unhampered ; if he could be always indifferent. The west had red streaks—— He drove away.”

“Oh, I hate the man !” cried Janet, indignantly. “It’s just like him ! What became of her ?”

“There she is now, at the end of the room,” said Kent, smiling at the evident astonishment of the group around him.

Eric Hall’s wife was lifting her coffee cup and laughing. Her filmy sleeves fell away from perfect arms ; a jewel flashed from a tiny silver band in her hair. She was clearly the loveliest, the most distinguished woman there.

They stared at her.

“But you just said that he drove away !” someone exclaimed in amazement. “That was the drama of your story !”

“He drove back and got her,” finished Kent sententiously.



PHILIP CURTISS

*The Resurrection of Chilton Hills*



## THE RESURRECTION OF CHILTON HILLS

I HAD a strange experience, not long ago. I had an invitation to spend a week-end in Chilton Hills, and it is quite impossible to describe the sensation it gave me. It was much as if I had been asked for a week-end in Thebes.

Twenty-five years ago, of course, Chilton Hills was probably the smartest resort in America, and a visit there was like a novel by Ouida at the height of her fame. The place had, I believe, the first eighteen-hole golf links in this country, and at one time two others were under construction. It had the best polo field away from Long Island, and in the autumn there was fox-hunting three times a week.

The North-eastern tennis championship was played there every summer, and a famous man-about-town once remarked that it was the only place outside of New York where one could always be sure of good bridge. During a visit that I made one college vacation there was a dance every night at the country club or one of the cottages, and that year appeared the daring innovation of dancing in the afternoon.

Only vaguely, out of the kaleidoscopic haze of that momentous fortnight, do I remember a vast jumble of lesser events such as paperchases, regattas on the lake, and morning concerts by a string quartet, although I do recall that when we younger guests were starting off to play golf or ride the older members of the household would usually be going to a lecture on the art of George Sand or an exhibition of Indian baskets.

Then something happened, and little by little Chilton Hills

disappeared from the social map. Indeed, on my second visit, I wondered whether it had not also disappeared from the topographical map, for hardly had my car crossed the boundaries of the village when I began to feel that I was in a city of the dead.

On a hill near the centre of the town was a gaunt stone chimney with a few charred beams to show where once had stood the finest country club in the United States. Beyond it loomed the empty shell of the famous Chilton Arms, a great summer hotel, with a rusted chain stretched across its gateway and its acres of windows now boarded up. At a turn in the road was a simple meadow, knee-deep in daisies and buttercups, with only a few rotted lengths of whitewashed fence to remind the traveller that once it had been a polo field.

Only a few private cottages, set back in their lawns and trees, seemed to be well kept and prosperous. Among them, happily, was the familiar place of my former host, Luke Munday; but if the public life of Chilton Hills had entirely disappeared, so, correspondingly, had the private life slowed down from eight or ten thousand revolutions a minute to two or three languid turns a year.

On my previous visit, as I could well remember, it had been several hours after my arrival before I had even time to unpack my bag, but now, as soon as the first formalities were over, Luke turned to me with an apologetic smile.

"Bob," he confessed, "to be frank, I have the habit of taking a nap every afternoon. Do you mind being left alone?"

To tell the truth, it was so many years since I *had* been left alone, except in the subway, that I didn't know whether I minded or not. For two or three minutes I wandered around, feeling quite lost and ill at ease, then suddenly I saw a steamer chair ranged invitingly on a cool, shaded terrace. As I stretched out luxuriously, my eye was caught by a book that



someone had left on the bricks at my feet and, the next thing I knew, I was being called for dinner.

And that was exactly the pace at which we passed the whole week-end. In the evening, Helen Munday played the piano in rambling fashion while Luke and I loafed at full length and smoked our cigars. Nobody came in, nobody went out, and I do not recall that the telephone rang during my entire visit.

On Saturday we strolled down to a pond in the woods, undressed in an old barn, and went in for a swim. On Sunday night we found ourselves again on the terrace with crickets chirping in a neighbouring hayfield and, over our heads, a blanket of stars. It was funny but, actually, I seemed to have forgotten that there still *were* stars and crickets. I had an unconscious feeling that when the movies and motor-cars had come in they had gone out.

It was beautiful, it was incredibly beautiful, but it was all so different from the old Chilton Hills that I could not lose the sensation that there was some mystery about it, something that should be explained. At the same time I could see that it might easily be a tender subject, and it was only there under the stars that I found a way to make guarded inquiries.

"Luke," I asked, "have you been here ever since the old days?"

"Oh, no," answered Luke, easily, "there were eight or ten summers that the house was closed. We only came back when we heard that the country club had burned down."

"You mean," I asked, vaguely, "that you meant to rebuild it?"

"Decidedly not," replied Luke. "We came back only when we felt sure that it never would be rebuilt."

His words did not seem exactly to be making sense, and for a moment longer I floundered around.

"But what," I asked, "has become of the other people that

used to be here: the Haddons—wasn't that their name?—and that polo man with the awfully pretty wife—and that brisk, breezy chap who used to be something important in steel?"

"Oh, they're still here," answered Luke. "You'd probably see them if you stayed around long enough. Most of them went away, as I did, for a while, but in the end they all came back. Of course," he added, "for a man in my circumstances it is the wildest extravagance to be living here now."

If his previous words had been somewhat mysterious, these last were a cryptogram.

Luke explained.

"Oh, it isn't the cost of living. That's simple enough. It's the value of the land. Land to-day in Chilton Hills is worth five times as much as it was in the old days. If I would consent to sell this place I could get enough to live in luxury for the rest of my life."

"But why?" I demanded. "What makes it so valuable?"

"The fact," replied Luke, "that Chilton Hills to-day is a spot absolutely unique."

Then apparently seeing that he must tell once again what was to him a very old story, Luke leaned back and began.

"You remember, of course, what Chilton Hills was like in the old days?"

"Yes, I remember very clearly. It was——"

"It was a nightmare," broke in Helen, sharply.

Luke laughed. "I'm afraid it was before we got through. You know, most Americans are still pure savages when it comes to pleasure. A savage believes that if one quinine pill will do him good, twenty quinine pills will do him twenty times as much good. And that used to be exactly the state of mind here in Chilton Hills.

"Because we had fun with one golf links, we thought we would have twice as much fun with two. Because we got a

thrill from a little scrub polo team that beat everything in the county, we thought we would have a bigger thrill if we got better players and beat everything in the world. Because we liked to dance once a week, we tried to be six times as happy by dancing every night.

"The result was that in the end we were so highly organised and equipped for pleasure that we didn't have any more fun. We were so busy organising tournaments and taking tickets for polo games and running to railways to meet musicians for our concerts that we no longer had any time to play in the tournaments or watch the polo, or listen to the music.

"One summer I was treasurer or secretary of eight different drives or committees or organisations, I was selling a million dollars' worth of bonds for the new country club and at the same time I was trying to run a business of my own in New York. Everybody else was just as busy and, apart from this, we had our private entertaining. That same summer we went to forty-three formal dinners and gave eleven in return. When my vacation was over I was flat on my back."

"And then what happened?"

"Well, I for one," replied Luke, "simply woke up. Helen and I faced the situation and asked each other, 'What for?' The next summer we went to a little resort in Germany where we didn't know a soul and couldn't even speak the language and had a perfectly glorious time. It was such a success that for nine years we went abroad every summer, always seeking a place where we were absolutely unknown.

"One by one all the other old families did much the same thing. The sports and dances dropped off for lack of support, then the country club burned down, and in five years the town was flat.

"But after all," continued Luke, "home is home, and in the end we had a bright idea. When Chilton Hills was no longer smart or popular we quietly slipped back here and had the most

peaceful, unbroken summer we had ever known. But the trouble was that most of the other old timers each had the same idea, and the first thing we knew the old state of affairs was threatening to start up again.

"You know, among any dozen given people, there is always some ass who is never happy unless he is organising something, and very shortly someone decided to get up a bazaar for the benefit of the visiting nurse. A dozen of us who were still jumpy from the old days saw the danger and we offered to give a thousand dollars if they wouldn't have the bazaar. From that simple beginning grew one of the most remarkable organisations in the world—The Red Ticket Club."

"It sounds good," I said. "What is it?"

"Every year," replied Luke, "each householder in Chilton Hills pays a hundred dollars and is given a red ticket. This exempts him from subscribing to or attending any bazaar, masquerade, treasure hunt, musicale, ball, dance, hop, or any public event of any kind whatsoever and, if he is even asked to a private dinner and does not care to go, all he has to do is reply 'Red Ticket' and nothing more is said.

"Out of the funds thus collected are supported the church, the fire department, the library, the local Red Cross; and any surplus funds are given to foreign missions. In two years we had applications for membership from all over the United States, and you couldn't get an inch of ground in Chilton Hills for love or money. As a matter of fact, we ourselves buy up any bits of property that come on the market, and to celebrate our tenth anniversary we bought the old Chilton Arms just for the fun of seeing it rot."

"It sounds like a work of genius," I suggested, "but what are you going to do when another, more foolish generation comes along?"

"Alas," said Luke, "that is already one of our greatest worries, but the only thing we have devised so far is the

Chilton Memorial. Near the centre of the town did you notice something that looks like the ruins of the old country club?"

"But isn't it the ruins of the old club?"

"Oh, goodness, no. The real chimney blew down two years after the fire and the charred beams all crumbled away, so we had a replica of the chimney made in solid concrete and false wreckage in rust-proof steel. Every Fourth of July all the children of the town are taken to look at them—not collectively, mind you, but when their parents feel good and ready. Simply and sadly they are told the story of the old Chilton Hills and then they are shown an inscription at the base of the chimney—a big rock on which is carved a modified version of Shakespeare's epitaph :

" ' Good friends, for Heaven's sake forebeare  
To digg the dust enclosed heare ;  
Bleste be the man that spares the stones  
And curst be he that moves my bones.' "



ALEXANDRE ARNOUX

*The Late Bernard*





## THE LATE BERNARD

I ASSURE your Worship that the only reason I have not murdered my cousin Bernard sooner is that I was brought up in *bourgeois* surroundings amid strong religious influences. After such a childhood as mine, some force, some principle always remains to stay one on the very edge of the abyss.

My hands are clean, not blood-stained. My will, and my will alone, committed the murder. What a paradox is the justice of man! I did not strangle a passer-by in a fit of drunkenness or to enable me to pay my rent, without premeditation, almost with pity, and a sort of miserable sympathy akin to that experienced by the matador when he gives the *coup de grâce* to the bull, his means of livelihood, by the general when he sends his troops over the top, his means of promotion.

By God, perhaps, when he sends this saint to martyrdom, or by a little child who sucks a stick of barley-sugar, and weeps to see it melt away. . . . Had I done this I would have been persecuted by my kind, the machinery of retribution would have been set in motion.

On the contrary, I murder deliberately, my whole being approving the crime, and no one takes the slightest notice, no one interfered with me in any way. I come and go freely, my name is not struck from the electoral lists.

I am not requested to resign from the vice-presidency of the Carabineers of Gros-Cailloou. The blade of the guillotine remains in its sheath. Better still, I demand protection against

my victim, and my demand is well founded. As a matter of fact, it is I who am the injured one in this affair.

Bernard sleeps in Bagneux cemetery ; he has a thirty-year concession ; wreaths and a cross. What more can he want ? While I, the poor murderer, the wretched assassin, the loser in the affair, I am asked to pay for an old lady's kneecap ! That passes the limit. I crave your Worship's protection and will tell you the story as briefly as possible. Consider it carefully and judge. Here is my absolutely truthful report.

Bernard, saving the customary respect for the dead, was an unmitigated bounder. Tall and thin, always darkly clad, with his small head, his arms held closely to his sides, he looked like a rolled-up umbrella or a wind-tossed cypress in a cemetery. I saw him first at the Gare de l'Est, standing on the platform beside his trunk.

It was then that I was struck with his funereal appearance. The somewhat coffin-like trunk with Bernard oscillating beside it made one instinctively carry one's hand to one's hat and begin a paternoster. And in comparison, the shrill whistle of locomotives, the cries of the pillow-vendor seemed vain and trivial.

Bernard observed me shyly. I had just married his cousin Louise whom he had loved since childhood and who had refused him ; she had preferred my ruddy cheerful self. In a fit of despair he had thrown himself into the Moselle. Unfortunately a misguided locks attendant had fished him out.

Ever since that episode he had retained a sort of half-drowned aspect—hair, moustache, fingers, and coat-tails looked as though they might easily drip ; a cypress when in repose, a weeping-willow in motion.

Once in Paris he attached himself to us like a clam. Impossible to persuade him to return to his province, to his Moselle, where, after all, it is possible with a little goodwill to disappear. Having come to Paris for a few days only, he settles

down there out of sheer spite and in the hope of injuring me in some way.

He rents a room opposite our apartment ; he watches us from his window and invites himself to dinner three times a week. He finds a job as a commercial traveller. He is ravaged by jealousy. I am very patient with him. It is rather flattering to be a cause of suffering to another man.

He takes advantage of the situation, makes himself at home, and at the end of six weeks the trouble begins. He attempts to poison my wife's mind. He tells her that I spend my time running after other women, that the typists at my office are not remarkable for their virtue, that no one really knows how I spend my money, that it is always the most beautiful and the purest of women who are the most brazenly deceived by their husbands because they are blinded by their very purity ; the other husbands spend less on drinks, tobacco and similar indulgences and more on their wives, and so forth, and so forth. . . .

My wife is impressed. If I seem to be less tender it is because I have women friends. If, on the other hand, I am gay, lover-like, pressing my attentions, it is because other women have inspired me with desires that I seek to satisfy at home. There are sighs, concealed tears, red, swollen eyes, nerves, distress, insults, plates thrown at my head, and, finally, silence. A frozen, deadly, sepulchral silence.

I attempt to turn Bernard out of the house. Impossible. What ! I would deprive poor Louise of her one confidant, her protector, her only consolation. There they are, the two of them, silent, terrifying. She, overcome, convulsed with sobbing, he, balancing himself on his pigeon-toed feet, shaken by a storm of commiseration and rage. And between them myself, idiotic, violent, motionless.

That was my life, your Worship.

\*     \*     \*     \*

It lasted three years, without respite. A man brought up outside the Church could not have stood it a year. My religious upbringing enabled me to endure it for three.

However, on the first day of the third year I try to react. I pull myself resolutely together, I begin my attack. I will beat him yet, this cousin who makes my life a burden : all that is necessary is to discover his weak, his vulnerable point.

He is no longer in love; his hatred of me, his determination to ruin my life have taken the place of all other sentiments. It is I who now occupy Louise's old preponderant place in his thoughts, love slowly and insidiously has been superseded by deadly hatred. The possession of a woman, the ruin of a man, equal joys, ends to be attained by an equal degree of obstinate perseverance—but one excludes the other.

I have sought. I have sought. Bernard lives in deadly fear of pain and disease. He carefully avoids drug stores when walking, he trembles before a doctor and reads his condemnation in his face. I have him !

I begin with leaving treatises on hygiene on my table. Then it is the prospectus I have sent to him, allusions to his appearance, discreet sympathetic smiles if he coughs, little attentions that worry him. Next I take him to a lecture on tuberculosis.

I invite a talkative medical student to dinner ; I make him shine. He tells the story of an operation, enlarges on the unreliability of diagnostic science and the incredible abundance of bacilli. I buy a medical dictionary profusely illustrated with cuts of cirrhosis of the liver, lung lesions, ulcers, and I lend it to Bernard to charm his leisure moments. \*

God be praised. I breathe again. My wife gradually becomes her normal self ; she forgets her jealousy ; I begin to enjoy life anew while my enemy consults, has analyses made, diets and forgets me.

Wily, untiring, I torture him ; I give him no peace, he

becomes thin, ghastly, he fades away. No longer a cypress—a mere feather duster.

I never let him alone, I am his vice, the poison in his veins.

Louise laughs, grows plump, kisses me in dark corners, encourages my ardour.

I enjoy to the full my secret triumph.

Bernard wastes away. He lives in fear. An open window means pneumonia; a closed one, tuberculosis. If he drinks wine he is menaced by gout; if water by typhoid; alcohol spells delirium tremens; tobacco, endocarditis. At the barber's he risks skin disease, in a restaurant unnumbered contaminations of the mouth, in the subway grippe, in the sun fever, in the shade goitre. Nothing is aseptic, nothing permissible.

What to do? A remedy, one single radical remedy to free oneself from the tortures of doubt. A remedy. . . . One night, your Worship, I persuade Bernard to drink. I accompany him to a place I will not name. His will-power is gone, he gives himself up to alcohol and the rest with the zeal of a maniac.

For a week's time he doubts, examines himself, rebels, collapses. . . . On the seventh day he turns on the gas.

And I say to myself: "What a good time we'll have." Ah, indeed! I no longer bear Bernard the slightest ill-will, I send a wreath. I have won the rubber; we are quits.

Louise cries a little, experiences a melancholy satisfaction in imagining that he died for love of her. All goes smoothly, but Bernard is not disarmed, as I learn to my cost on the morning of the funeral. A delicate scruple had prevented me from attending the ceremony. He might have been shocked, might he not, might have thought in his coffin: "How dead

I must be, how reduced to nothing, that my cousin should follow me to the grave."

I wanted to spare him that humiliation. So I pretend to have important business on which depend my chances of promotion, my future. To go to my office I take at the Ecole Militaire the street-car that goes to Montrouge. Unfortunately, Bernard's funeral passes Avenue du Maine, as does the street-car line. The road is up, it is congested with labourers, switches, traffic blocks.

We pass the funeral under the railway bridge, it catches up with us at the rue de la Gaité, and we pass it again at the rue de Vanves. Three encounters. The first time I turn carelessly away and look absent-minded. All my hatred surges up in my heart. I will not salute Bernard the corpse when Bernard the man has given me three years of hell.

Take off my hat for him! Never! An old lady in black and a midinette cross themselves, a labourer lifts his cap. The street disapproves of me. I don't care. I whistle to myself. The old lady looks at me, wondering at the extent of my boorishness. In Paris one may jostle the living but the dead must be treated with respect. The incident is over at last.

At the second encounter I stick firmly to my resolve. The lady in black touches my elbow and shows me the hearse upon which my wreath is well in evidence. The other passengers murmur. The midinette sneers: "I don't suppose he ever had a death in his own family." The labourer looks me up and down scornfully, the conductor asks me for my ticket and examines it with suspicion. I remain adamant.

But the third time, as I stamp my feet and defiantly put my hands in my pockets, the street-car bursts with indignation. Insults and sarcastic advice rain on me from all sides. The old lady passes the utmost bounds of civility. I take her by the arm, not roughly, just to calm her wrath and to prevent her from breathing into my face. The midinette squeals, conjures

me to let such an old lady alone. "Old," screams the victim, "old yourself!"

The labourer intervenes and knocks his box of tools against my leg. Uproar, tumult, general mêlée. The funeral had passed on and is gaining ground, a policeman pulls out his notebook, a dog barks, a chauffeur honks. The old lady recoils, misses the step, falls out on to the pavement, shrieks that she is being assassinated, and puts her kneecap out of joint. The entire car, witness of my brutality, accuses me. The policeman takes notes. And I am sued for assault and battery and ordered to pay for the old lady's kneecap.

Is it fair, your Worship? Is it just? Am I responsible? I demand sanctuary, aid and protection. If Bernard had not come to Paris, if he had not poisoned my existence, would I have been obliged to convince him that it was necessary to die? If he were not dead, would he have had a funeral? If he had no funeral would I have neglected to salute his coffin?

Would public opinion have crushed me with its resentment? Would the old lady have missed the step? Would not her precious kneecap still be working admirably? And it is I, I who must expiate, who must pay, who must hear myself condemned? No, your Worship, I know that you will defend my cause. The memory of Bernard shall go to prison, his heirs pay for the kneecap. Otherwise, fear the despair of an honest mortal driven to the utmost extremity.





FRITZ HOPMAN

*The Bearer of the Message.*



## THE BEARER OF THE MESSAGE

**D**URING the winter of 1869, I entrusted my medical work for a while to two of my friends, and left Paris so as to attend the International Congress of Medicine at Moscow. The first sessions of the Congress were extremely interesting.

Famous men of the day exposed new theories and discussed new methods which have been quite forgotten since, and I entered, with the ardent enthusiasm of youth, into the discussions that followed these discourses.

On the third day of the Congress, a young Swedish professor had been talking of the treatment of epilepsy by "mesmerism," as psychic medicine was called in those days. During the course of these interesting and stimulating debates I heard telepathy and the significance of dreams discussed by eminent men whom I could not but respect. Hitherto, I had considered such phenomena as inventions of the superstitious, but as I was on the way back to my hotel, I realised that the materialism of my young days had had a rude blow, and that it was time I revised my outlook on life.

That evening, the Governor of Moscow gave a dinner in honour of the delegates; it was an assembly of the most brilliant diplomatists and officers, of renowned scholars and beautiful women.

I was sitting next to a Dorpot surgeon, who knew French very well, and I was absolutely in my element. I was still at the age when all hero-worship has not been stifled, and I lived in the timid admiration that a young man must have experi-

enced later, when he saw for the first time Pasteur, Lister, Metchnikoff or Virchow. To my romantic mind these great men seemed like stars in the firmament, totally superior beings.

Moreover, I was conscious that, for the time being, at least, even I was on an equal footing with the great men who were present.

Someone touched my arm gently. I was surprised to see a woman, whom I did not know, speaking to me in Russian. She was an intriguing creature, pale, supple and slight. The pallor of her face was remarkable, and lines of care marked it. Amid an assembly of such brilliant men and women she introduced an element of sadness and anxiety. It was as though a window had been opened, through which an icy wind blew, driving snow into the room.

As I did not understand Russian, I appealed to the surgeon, to whom I had been talking, for an explanation. He told me that the woman had heard that my treatment of affections of the heart was excellent, and that she wanted me to attend a relative of hers who was dangerously ill.

Impelled by a cavalier spirit, I answered that I was ready to accompany her. It would mean missing the gala dinner, but that was one of the chief reasons that induced me to accept, for self-sacrifice is one of the foremost needs of youth. Moreover, my pride was flattered because I was chosen out of all that galaxy of great men. However, I asked no questions but took my hat and overcoat and set off.

I remember, as though it all happened yesterday, the sight I saw when I went towards the door of the palace with the woman who had spoken to me. At that moment, a girl in a white mantle came up the steps to the palace. The light, coming through the open doors, fell on her face. I can see all that now, but it is like a photograph yellow with age, like a relic of the past that survives only in an old man's memory.

We passed the row of vehicles, and we were fortunate in finding a troika—the ordinary vehicle used in the streets of Moscow, and drawn by three horses. While the woman was talking to the driver, I observed him by the light of a lantern. He had red cheeks, and rough, furrowed skin, a thick beard and an insignificant nose, as all Russians have.

We took our places in the troika, and passed through some streets that were brightened by lights from big shops. After that we came to great deserted open spaces, where the outline of equestrian statues could be discerned.

In places the white domes of Russian churches stood out in startling contrast against the dark sky, giving a strange, weird effect. We met no one but a squadron of soldiers with guns and a poacher. After passing through the dim suburbs we reached the country, leaving behind us the light and noise of the old city.

But before long I became a prey to doubts and distrust, and I regretted the light and warmth of the palace I had so thoughtlessly left. I cursed my own credulity. The silence and monotony of the journey made me sink into a drowsy sleep. I felt detached sometimes as though I were alone in the sledge, sometimes as though I were old, very old.

I began to dread an attack of wolves, and I wished I had brought a revolver with me. I did not know what to think of my adventure, for in a country infested with secret societies anything might happen. Was I walking into some trap? Was I not suspected of Nihilism? Was I going to be robbed? But why not choose someone rich? I invented endless theories, and rejected them all.

I was almost asleep when we reached a little village, where lights were still burning in the windows of some of the houses.

The horses were foaming and panting when they stopped outside a kind of inn. The door opened, and I saw, through a cloud of tobacco smoke, the dark form of a man in a tunic

and high boots. We got out of the sledge, and I was glad to stretch my stiff legs. The driver was in conversation with the innkeeper, but the woman led me farther on in the darkness.

I had decided to defend myself to the best of my power if I were attacked. There was perfect silence all around us ; as we made our way through the snow, we did not speak a word. I was greatly distressed, and my mind was full of the talk about the occult, to which I had listened during the afternoon. I thought of the stories my nurse had told me, when she was putting me to bed ; of spectres haunting newly opened graves, and I saw in my mind's eye, tombs, coffins, black-covered lanterns lit on grey days, and all the fantastic visions that have profaned the idea of death and made it hideous and terrifying.

Finally we reached the garden wall of a dark-looking country house. I rang, footsteps approached. I turned round thinking that the woman was going to speak. To my great horror and amazement, I found that she had disappeared. I was alone. I could not understand how she could have vanished so quickly and so silently, but I had no time to indulge in speculations, for the door opened, and I saw a girl standing before me.

I explained to her in French the purpose of my visit. She answered hesitatingly that I must have made a mistake, since all the members of the family were in good health. She asked me to go in and speak to her father, who spoke and understood French better than she did. I was in utter despair, but I followed her to a kind of study, where an old man was sitting in an arm-chair, beside an earthenware stove.

There was no need of a specialist to tell that he was suffering from some form of heart disease. His face was a bluish-purple, and his nose was red like a drunkard's. He held a cigarette in his hand, and it quivered each time his heart beat.

I greeted him, and explained again the reason of my visit. The old man looked at me over his spectacles and frowned. Evidently he didn't believe a single word of what I said, and he wanted to know my real intentions. To appease him and to explain my disturbing his peaceful dwelling at such an hour, I told him all the details of my adventure. He listened with eager attention to my story, and when I had finished, he said :

"I don't know what to think of it. In any case, you are wrong. There is no one ill here. But now you have taken so much trouble for nothing, I should like you to stay a while. You can't return to Moscow to-night. You will have to stay at the inn. I should be glad to offer you hospitality, but we do not receive visitors, and we have not many comforts to offer."

He passed me a box of cigarettes and the daughter made me some tea with lemon and rum. Meanwhile, I constructed a theory, more or less unconsciously. I decided that the woman realised that the old man was suffering from heart disease, although he himself did not. She saw that the advice of a doctor was indispensable, and she had found a very cunning ruse to send him a doctor without being compromised herself.

I asked the old man if he was well. He smiled and said :

"I'm sixty-one years old, and I have never been laid up in bed. Of course, weakness comes with old age. I'm not as strong as I was, and I have asthma a little, but apart from that I am very well. No, doctor, you can take it from me, there's not a rouble to be earned here."

The conversation turned on the Congress and on life in Paris, about which he had read much. His daughter, a slight, shy girl, gazed at me with her deep, dark eyes, but took no part in the conversation. The father's conversation was witty and gay, and this surprised me in a hermit.

Probably my conversation brightened him, for he talked

of his student days, of his youthful follies, and of the time when he was a young lawyer. For an hour he recalled his forgotten youth and talked of the good old times. Suddenly the lamp flickered as though it were about to go out.

Candles were brought, but the charm was broken, and I felt like a young husband who suddenly sees an ill omen. The clock was striking twelve when I took my leave. The old man asked me to call the next day, and naturally I promised to do so. The daughter came with me to the door, and said :

"I'm so glad you have come, doctor, even though it was by error. Papa has not been so gay for many years. You must come back to-morrow. I wish we had a few more visitors. It would do him good."

I had a kind of presentiment that I should find my silent companion on the road, but I saw no one. Lights were still burning in the inn, and when I entered the innkeeper was reading the newspaper to some men, who looked like peasants, wearing Russian tunics. They had long hair and long beards, sombre faces, and they all sat in the same position, with their chins in their hands.

The atmosphere of the inn was stifling and a cloud of tobacco smoke was rising slowly towards the ceiling. I made the innkeeper understand that I wanted a room for the night by gesticulating, and he took me to a room where there was a huge bed.

There were some pictures of saints of the Greek Church hanging on the whitewashed wall. The innkeeper brought candles and lit a big wood fire. I did not want to sleep, so lit a cigar and sat in an armchair to think over the happenings of the evening.

I had just thrown the end of my cigar away when I heard footsteps on the stairs. I was terrified, for I was afraid it was a trap and that I was going to be robbed. But it was the innkeeper and the daughter of the old man with whom I had



spent the evening. The girl seemed greatly excited, but she did not lose control of herself.

"How fortunate that you are here, doctor," she said. "Poor father had scarcely got into bed when he had a terrible attack. Perhaps he's had too much excitement to-night. I'm sorry to trouble you, but would you mind coming with me? Perhaps you could do something for him."

The room into which she took me was lofty and uninviting; there was a sharp smell of eau de Cologne and of ammonia in the air. A lamp was burning on a table where there were the usual things one sees in a bedroom—hair brush, razor, clock and a big tiepin with a cameo.

The last flame was dying out on the hearth. The curtains of the bed were drawn aside and an old servant was praying at the bedside, while another was sitting on a chair, weeping.

I listened for the old man's heart beats, but there was not the slightest breath. Death had done its work, and the limbs were already growing stiff. I broke the news to the girl as gently as possible, but she had already understood, and mastered herself with a truly feminine energy.

While I was washing my hands and thinking of the adventures of the day, I noticed a framed oil painting. It was painted in 1830 style, and it showed a young woman with low dress and flattened hair. Without the least doubt I recognised in her the mysterious companion who had sought me out in the hall of the palace at Moscow. My surprise was so great that I could not restrain a cry.

"Who is that?" I asked, pointing to the portrait. "It is the woman who brought me here."

The girl looked at me fixedly. Her upper lip was twisted in an expression of incredulity, but seeing me look uneasy, she, too, grew pale.

"It's my mother," she said. "She died when I was born, twenty years ago."



EDWARD ACHESON

*Hide Your Eyes*



## HIDE YOUR EYES

**D**R. KRESSMAN made a note on the pad before him and leaned back in the chair. What was she talking about now? Her misunderstood childhood again? She was an exhausting patient, this Mrs. Benson. Spoiled. Too much money. But a hard, integrated personality.

Suffering from a compulsion neurosis. Unable to stop counting. Common symptom . . . Counts steps, up and down, counts trees, rows of books, shuts her eyes and imagines series of things to count . . . Counts in her sleep . . . So simple if it could only be explained to the patient . . . Counts so she won't have to think of something, something she doesn't want to think about, something she's subconsciously determined she won't think about . . . But eventually she'll have to. If she keeps up the analysis, eventually it will come out, this despised thing she's trying to hide from herself . . . Then she'll stop counting . . . Then there'll be nothing to cover up . . . Talking about her father now? . . . No, her husband. She should have no difficulty in that relationship, the two men are so much alike . . . Nature's method of keeping the strain pure. Women always turning instinctively to men like their fathers. Well, *she* had . . . this Mrs. Benson. Her trouble wasn't as simple as that . . . Something deeper . . . Let her talk. The hour was almost up anyway.

Dr. Kressman stifled a yawn. He was very tired. He hadn't slept. He hadn't slept for a number of nights. Something kept gnawing at him. It wasn't true. He knew it

wasn't true. But he couldn't get free of it. It waited beside his bed like a sentinel. And when he glanced over at his wife before switching off the light, he knew he wasn't going to sleep. And he didn't. He lay there, staring into the darkness, explaining away his fears.

His wife's sudden interest in sculpture, modelling. Most likely a sublimation. They had no children. The maternal instinct re-channelled into creative art. A natural outlet. Nothing whatsoever to do with this fellow Newman. New-man. Interesting word psychologically, New-man. Her animation. Had she been more animated lately? More completely alive? . . . Physical, entirely. She'd been ill. Now she was better.

She just felt more poignantly the value of what she'd regained. And her renewed interest in clothes wasn't significant. Of course not! . . . She was young. Fifteen years younger than he was. And youth did things by fits and starts. Trial and error, part of the adjustment process.

And then the doctor would get up very quietly and go downstairs to the sideboard. He'd pour out a drink and hold it up to the light, mustering a smile. "Physician, heal thyself!" For he knew the human mind and he knew rationalisation when he met it. He was trying to explain this Newman chap out of existence. He knew what he was doing, but he couldn't stop doing it. Rationalising him *into* existence, really. Then he'd take a second drink and go back to bed and lie there and stare into the stillness. He was very tired.

He yawned again and looked quickly to see whether Mrs. Benson had noticed. She hadn't. She was flat on her back with her eyes closed, talking, talking forever. The doctor listened absently. She was back on the theme of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. That book seemed to be an obsession with Mrs. Benson. That was the fifth time she'd brought it up in as many days.

The doctor selected a pencil and waited. Mrs. Benson's voice droned on. "What if she was unfaithful to him. . . . Unfaithful ! . . . If that isn't a male word for you . . . Unfaithful. And Lawrence makes such an unholy fuss over it, talks about it, loves it, rolls in it. I'd like to see *his* mind psychoanalysed. Probably look like a particularly nasty garbage dump on a hot day . . . Filthy, low, unspeakable——"

The doctor made a note of the three words : "Filthy, low, unspeakable." She had used them over and over again.

"And what if she was unfaithful to him ? She didn't love him. He didn't love her. Or else he did. I forget. But she didn't love him . . ."

Dr. Kressman glanced at his clock. Almost five. He'd be through at five. This was his last patient. And he was nearly through with her for good. He drew a circle on his pad, and then a square inside the circle. From the middle of three sides of the square he drew lines into the centre. That was the way one found the centre, where those lines crossed. He was almost at the centre of Mrs. Benson's difficulty. So many lines pointed to it. She loved her husband, and she'd had an affair, either actual or imaginary, with someone else.

Whether it was actual, or whether she'd just thought about it didn't matter. The affair itself didn't matter. It was the fact that Mrs. Benson was ashamed of it, that she fought against admitting it to herself. That was the thing she refused to think about, the thing that kept demanding to be thought about. So she counted.

This last thing, this defence of Lady Chatterley which kept cropping out, was a perfect example of projection. She transferred herself to the person of Lady Chatterley and then argued her cause, because her conscience wouldn't allow her to argue her own directly.

"Five o'clock, Mrs. Benson," the doctor said, trying not to sound relieved.

"Oh," Mrs. Benson said, and was silent. Finally, she sat up. "There's no use going on, Doctor. We're not getting anywhere. And it tears me all to pieces. Worse now, really."

"Perhaps it will be," the doctor smiled. "We'll try it once more. To-morrow at the same time."

"Well, once more," Mrs. Benson agreed wearily.

The doctor smiled to himself. They were all that way. The nearer they came to a solution of their problem, the harder they fought against the cure. How passionately we really love our maladies!

"To-morrow, then," he said.

He rang for the nurse, who showed Mrs. Benson out. Then the nurse returned. "Your wife is here, Doctor. She's been waiting some time."

"Please bring her in right away."

The doctor leaned back and put his hand over his eyes. Psychoanalysis, what an infant industry! In its present development, like hand-weaving. So hard on the operator. Putting all those vari-coloured strands into a warp and woof, finding the pattern, tracing it . . .

The door opened and Mrs. Kressman came in. "Eugen, my darling, how tired you look!"

He opened his eyes. She was glorious. She was youth and beauty and enthusiasm. The doctor felt suddenly old. Old and very tired.

"I've had a hard day," he said. "And I'm looking forward to an evening at home. Wild horses couldn't drag me out to-night."

"Oh, Eugen! I *am* so sorry. I didn't know."

"Know what?"

"That you'd be tired this way. I accepted an invitation for you."

"Oh, sweetheart . . .!"



"I know. I shouldn't have. But, really, darling, couldn't you make the effort this once? Mr. Newman's giving a studio party, and I did so want to show you off."

He smiled. Those night-thoughts were so obviously pathologic. She actually wanted him to meet this Newman chap. He felt a little ashamed of himself. "Not I, dear. But you run on and show yourself off. If the man's half an artist, that ought to be more than he can bear."

She made a little grimace. "I won't go. Not without you."

"Certainly you will, my dear. They'll be counting on you, I know. Everybody does. You've got so much to offer."

"But I don't see why you can't come," she said.

"I've had a wretched day. Really, I have, dear. The patients may think it is hard on them, but I'll take their places any time they'll take mine."

"That same one?" Barbara asked. No names were ever exchanged in the Kressman household. Professional ethics. But the cases were known by familiar tags. "That same one" stood for Mrs. Benson.

"That very one!" the doctor smiled. "But we're coming to the end of the string there. She'll be a well woman in two weeks—or less, if she'll come every day."

"Oedipus complex?" his wife asked. She liked to think she "shared" things with her husband, and she had, as a matter of fact, gathered quite a good deal of the nomenclature without fixing the basic facts beneath.

"More complicated. That's involved, but the difficulty's deeper seated. She's a woman of very great moral stamina. She's done something that, in a weaker woman, wouldn't have made any difference. In her, the two sides of her nature are at war. She tries to forget. She tries to pretend she hasn't done it or thought it. But subconsciously she knows

she has. And she can't bear to admit it even to herself, let alone to me. But it's coming nearer and nearer the surface."

"Unfaithful?" Barbara asked.

"I'm afraid so," the doctor answered, glancing at his notes.

"Did she tell you so?"

"Well, no. Not directly. But we have ways of finding those things for ourselves."

"And most of the time you're wrong," his wife smiled.

"Sometimes, I'll admit. But not very often. Almost never in a case like this. Projection is one of the most common psychophenomena. She identifies herself with some woman who hasn't been exactly virtuous, some woman in history, or fiction, or some acquaintance of hers, perhaps. And then she sets about defending *her*. Not herself, you understand. But the other woman. If she could defend herself, she'd be mentally healthy. But she can't."

"Perhaps she thinks she doesn't need any defence," Barbara pointed out.

"But she does. Her defence of those other women shows she does, or rather, that she thinks she does."

"On the other hand, there's just a chance you're wrong. And you make this poor woman come in here day after day and exhaust herself, while you test some inadequate theory of yours."

"Hardly inadequate, my dear, and it isn't a theory any longer. . . . Besides, the treatment's for her good, I don't *make* her come, you know."

"It's the same thing. You're talking to her, wearing her down, day after day, just the way the Inquisitors did."

"But they were scarcely trying to cure. Some cures are unpleasant, you know, my dear. But very necessary."

"But the object's the same. You're trying to drag information out of her, make her confess to something she most likely didn't do."

"There's almost no doubt that she did."

"And what if she did! What if she was unfaithful. Perhaps her husband didn't love her. Or she him. You can't make blanket condemnations like that, you know."

"I'm not condemning anything. I'm merely trying to find out."

"But why? Why find out? Why not let her keep her secret? Most likely she had a thousand reasons for doing what she did. Things aren't always either good or bad, you know. You can't just label things black or white. There are greys as well, and lots of them. A woman in a situation like that is always condemned. But her motives aren't necessarily as mean and low and unspeakable as people pretend they are."

The doctor didn't want to argue. He was very tired. He picked up his pencil and sat looking at the notes in front of him. His weary mind ran on in the channels of his profession: he was too tired to stop it. "Mean, low and unspeakable." Strange the way those words recurred. Almost a perfect pattern. And vicarious defence, a type of transference through projection. This last thing, this firm resistance to questioning, the feeling that the doctor was "prying." How familiar that was. He wished he had had stenographic notes of that argument for Mrs. Benson. An almost complete transference offering vindication for yourself through the medium of another.

He picked up his pencil and drew the last line into the centre of the circle before him. The "case history" on Mrs. Benson was complete. It was just a matter of getting her to admit it. He glanced up. Suddenly he realised he wasn't talking to Mrs. Benson.



OLIVER LA FARGE

*Haunted Ground*



## HAUNTED GROUND

GEORGE WATERSON stood up uncertainly. He was shaky and bitterly cold ; the nor'wester blew clear through him ; by the last faint daylight he could see sparse dry snowflakes driven under the leaden sky. Well, that had failed, too, and the immediate business was, apparently, to continue living.

He looked around. By God, with the whole bay to choose from, he had to go ashore on the beach of the Hales' place—Haunted Ground, the country people's by-name for it, said itself in his mind. Under his dominant consciousness of cold and misery was a conviction that his luck had irrevocably turned, that now every last chance was viciously levelled against him.

For the moment, at least, he must continue living. This was too cold. There was nothing for it but to go up to the Hales', to Haunted Ground. Wouldn't you know something like that would happen ? He climbed the familiar path up the steep bluff behind the beach, and at the top, where locust trees broke the wind, stopped to look back. The *Lucy* was just bits of wood and spars twisting on the rocks, mouthed by the breakers ; there was no longer even the shape of a boat. He didn't want to look. He faced inland.

He heard his heart beating clearly, almost thunderously, and very slow. Exhaustion, he thought. There was a good half-mile of ascending road before him, leading up to the crest of the hill topped by the big, high-shouldered old Hale

house against the last grey of the western sky, with the elms on one side that always bent away from it, shaped by sea winds. It never did make a cheerful picture. But there were lighted windows.

He supposed Sue would be laid out in one of those rooms—Sue, Sue! Each fresh recollection of her death struck him with the force of the first impact. That damned old house so packed with death! Old Jasper Summers with a mouth full of broken teeth eagerly and bluntly telling him: "Did ye hear abaout Susan Hale? A burglar come into their haouse, first one's ben in the taownship in twenty years, last night and shot her dead." He saw again the triumphant gossip's face in a mist of horror, and heard the calm voice continuing about Mrs. Hale being sick from the shock, and so on, and on, and on.

Sue and John and himself having a snowball fight with hydrangeas. Mrs. Hale would probably have her in the sitting-room. In a coffin—oh! Sue riding his pony while he led and John envied. That must have been one of the few times when his money gave him an advantage over the country boy. A still picture and a remembered pain when Sue told him that she was engaged to John. Sue sobbing and clinging to him when John was lost with his boat off Brenton's reef. He had been shocked and ashamed then at a fierce joy that mingled with his sorrow for his friend and for her sorrow. She had said: "Anyway, living in Haunted Ground, I'll see him again when I'm old, the way Granny used to do."

That quiet assumption had made him feel chilly.

He heard his heartbeats again, clear and slow. Vaguely he thought that he had left something of great importance on the beach. It was terribly cold. The high wind had blown his clothes dry.

It hit him again. She was dead—dead—dead. He would



have won her in time, and she was dead. The first burglar in Quonochaug in twenty years had shot her through the heart. An unknown man casually in the course of his trade blotted out the sun and disappeared. A hole over her heart spreading red. Sue, Sue! Oh, God!

The house loomed gaunt and dark above the two lighted windows; the wind swooped around it, and the bare trees, twisting away, complained. He knocked and waited, shivering, then knocked again. His heartbeats sounded very loud, and he resisted an almost overwhelming impulse to turn and race back to the beach. He had left something vital there. Still no one answered him.

He turned the knob and entered. The sitting-room door was open, letting grateful warmth into the hall. Just as he had thought, the coffin was in the centre of the sitting-room. Mrs. Hale sat in a rocker opposite. It was unusual to see her with idle hands, not knitting or sewing.

"Please excuse me for coming in like this, Mrs. Hale——"

"That's all right, George; if I'd known what you were I'd have let you in. Sit down."

Odd way of putting it. She looked pale and weak, and her speech, for all its New England precision, had a quality of vagueness. George moved toward the coffin.

"Don't disturb her."

What on earth did she think he was going to do?

"I figured she was tired, and she's laid out so pretty I'm just letting her rest awhile. She's to be buried Thursday."

An unpleasant feeling came over George that the shock had unbalanced the old lady. He gazed at the girl's uncovered face, the rich golden-brown hair, long lashes making shadows on the cheeks, delicate, warm mouth. He thought in trite adjectives, chiefly repeating "lovely." He was glad for the macabre skill of an undertaker who had touched her mouth with lipstick. She had never been a pale person, Sue. The

plants of winter were about her, bittersweet, pine branches, even thorny barberry that she loved.

He stood looking for some minutes, not really thinking. His heartbeats seemed yet slower, and again he was troubled about something forgotten on the beach. At length he sat down.

"How did you come here?" Mrs. Hale emphasised the "you."

"When I heard, I—I didn't want to live any longer. I took the *Lucy* out and cracked on sail till she went. We were driven aground here, I was cast up on the beach, and—and here I am." He said the last words dully. "I hated it when I saw I was on your shore, but I'm glad I came now."

"It's hard for you, George. She'll be seeing John after church on Thursday."

"I know." Curious way she had of talking about it.

"It'd 'a' been better . . ." Her voice became inaudible, although her mouth continued in the motions of speech.

The shock had undoubtedly harmed her. He was in none too good shape himself. Those couldn't be heartbeats he heard, they were too slow, and they seemed to come from outside, or from something in his ears from being knocked around so. They were both of them unwell.

Mrs. Hale became audible again. "I don't know what will come of the house when we're all gone. People won't buy it. I tried to sell it before, just after Mr. Hale died. It's got a bad name. The Hales 've always been too friendly with their dead. And this—this holocaust it is, really—all centred round the house will make it worse. My cousins will get it, the Warwick Hales, you know. They'll subdivide, I guess. I thought you . . ." Her voice died again.

Decidedly, she needed rest and distraction. So did he. He was being positively haunted.

"Mrs. Hale, please don't think me officious, but I'm sure

you need rest ; we both do. I'm nervous, and I feel badly, and I'm sure you're overtired."

"I'm not tired. I feel spryer than in a long time, now it's over."

"Well, you know, at moments when you're talking your voice fades into actual silence, although you go on speaking."

"What ?"

"Don't be offended. You become inaudible. I'm sure it's fatigue. I know I'm hearing things, so many that I'm frightened. I can hear something like very, very slow heart-beats, and just now I've started hearing footsteps, and I have a strange idea that someone is pulling at my shoulder."

The old lady was sitting bolt upright, staring at him. "My Lord ! Then you aren't . . ." Her voice died out again ; he could see that she was doing her utmost to tell him something, to make herself heard. She became clear, "Get back to the beach, get back to the beach, you still have time !"

It made his hair rise. And his shoulder *was* being shaken. The beats were very slow. "I don't understand."

She made another desperate attempt to penetrate the silence that shut down between them. At last, with a tremendous effort, she rose and flung open the door to her bedroom. "Look."

"Oh, God !"

Mrs. Hale's body lay, serene and pale, on the bed.

Now very faintly he heard her voice.

"They've found you on the beach, that's what you hear, what's shaking your shoulder. Your heart's still beating. You've got time to go back, to live, to find someone else than Sue. Sue's meeting John on Thursday. Go back to the beach."

Now he knew what he had left behind on the shore, half in and half out of the water. Panic and black horror seized

him. He turned blindly toward the outer door, and found himself against Sue's coffin. He could see her sleeping face, clear, through a surrounding darkness.

"Hurry! You'll live and forget and find someone to take her place. Hurry!"

"She's in there?" He pointed to Sue's body.

"Yes, but don't stop to wake her. Hurry."

He stared at the dead girl. He stared into an infinite future. Someone to take her place.

"You know, Mrs. Hale, John was my best friend." He sat down. "Those heartbeats are very slow; they'll be over in a minute."

DANA BURNET

*Beauty in his Brain*



## BEAUTY IN HIS BRAIN

IT was after dark of a chill winter evening. Lawyer Gail Morton was alone in his office, which was lighted only by his desk lamp and the faint reddish glow of a coal fire in an old-fashioned grate. Sitting hunched over his desk, his chin in his big hands, Gail stared at a newspaper clipping, about four inches square, which lay under the lamp before him.

The clipping revealed the blurred photograph of a woman whose faded prettiness had survived even the newsman's cruel camera. The caption with the picture read : *Mrs. George Pendexter, whose Husband was Killed in Local Cigar-Store Hold-up.*

As he studied the picture Gail's long, lean body drooped. His massive bony face looked haggard in the lamplight. It was a face stamped with a Lincolnesque ugliness. This suggestion of a resemblance to the Great Emancipator had helped Gail enormously in his legal career. He was known as an honest man and the most successful lawyer in the large sprawling industrial town of Wakingham, Massachusetts.

Suddenly he straightened up and pulled his watch from his pocket. It was five minutes to seven. He put the clipping into his top desk drawer. He got up and walked to a closet beyond the fireplace. From the closet he took his overcoat and his black fedora hat. He put them on. He drew on his yellow pigskin gloves and buttoned them methodically. Then, instead of leaving the office, he went back to his desk and sat down—to wait.

In a few minutes he heard footsteps in the outer office. Immediately the door of his private office opened and a man stepped quickly, with a catlike movement, into the room. The man was short and squat; swarthy. His eyes were black and cold, yet curiously glittering; the eyes of a wary animal—or of a professional gangster.

"I'm Johnny Bracco," he said in a taut guttural voice.

Gail nodded.

"Sit down, Bracco. I didn't know whether to expect you or not."

"You says seven o'clock, alone here in your office, and I——"

"Yes. But I wasn't sure you'd show up." Gail indicated his hat and coat. "As you see, I was ready to go home. But you're right on time."

"And you're alone, Mr. Morton?" The man's eyes were bright with suspicion; but the lawyer met his gaze frankly, calmly.

"Certainly. You may search the place if you want to."

Bracco sighed and sat down in a chair on the other side of the desk, facing Gail. "No," he said. "I gotta trust somebody, and you're supposed to be a straight guy. That'll help me a lot, see? That's why I sent word to you I wanted you for my mouthpiece, see?" The dark man paused, and again the gleam of suspicion appeared in his eyes. "But what I wanna know is why you was willin' to talk turkey with me this time, when you wouldn't never take no business off me before? You're the smartest lawyer in this town. I and my mob could of used you all durin' the prohibition racket, but you al'ays turned me down cold. What's changed you, Mr. Morton?"

"I'll answer your question in a moment," said Gail. "First, let's consider the facts. From what I've read in the papers, you have been arrested for complicity in the Pendexter case. You are now out on bail. Is that correct?"



"Yeah! But they ain't got a thing on me. They didn't have no right to pinch me. I could sue them damn' dicks for false arrest. I——"

"You probably could," interrupted Gail. "Legally, no man can be arrested on an officer's suspicion. But practically it's done every day. The chances are you'll go to trial, Bracco. Public opinion will demand it. The whole town is worked up over that Pendexter murder."

"It wasn't no murder, Mr. Morton! Honest to Gawd it wasn't——"

"How do *you* know?" snapped Gail suddenly.

"I—well, I read the papers, too, see? And I seen where this guy Pendexter was found dead behind his counter with a gat in his hand. So nacherly we—I mean the other guy—would of had to shoot in self-defence and——"

"Boloney, Bracco!" Gail laughed briefly. "You certainly need a lawyer. You've practically admitted to me that you or your thugs killed that cigar-store clerk——"

"I never——"

"Don't lie to me, you rat!"

Involuntarily the gangster's right hand jerked toward his left shoulder, then fell limply to the desk.

"All right," Bracco said. "All right. I'll take that from you, on account I need you, see?"

"Then tell me the truth," Gail said sternly. "Or get out of my office. Jump your bail bond and run away. That'll be as good as a confession. Then, when they catch you, you won't need a lawyer. You'll need a priest."

"Now wait, Mr. Morton. Don't get sore. I'll tell you the truth, see. Only first I wanna know why you're takin' this case. Are you my mouthpiece or ain't you—and *why*?"

Gail's homely face, the face that resembled Lincoln's, was an imperturbable mask.

"This Pendexter case," he said, "interests me. According

to the newspapers, an innocent man was shot down in cold blood. There was no evidence of robbery, nor any other reason for the killing. From a legal standpoint the complete absence of motive interests me, Bracco. It fascinates me."

"Oh, yeah, Mr. Morton?" Once more the glittering black eyes darted suspicion. "So you're takin' the case becuz you're interested, huh? Just becuz you're interested!"

The worried scepticism in that harsh voice struck a note of warning in Gail Morton's brain. His expression changed; softened.

"Maybe you don't know it, Bracco," he said almost lightly. "But there has been a depression in the legal profession, too."

"Huh? Oh, yeah. I get you, Mr. Morton."

"I take it you'd be willing to pay me well for my services?"

"Sure! There'll be five grand in it for you anyways—just as a retainin' fee."

"Five thousand dollars! That's a lot of money, Bracco."

"I'm in a lotta trouble," growled the gangster.

Gail spoke slowly: "A man will do things for money that he wouldn't do for any other reason. You understand that, don't you Bracco?"

The gangster grinned with relief, showing his ragged tobacco-stained fangs. He was on his own ground now.

"Sure! It's the best reason in the world for doin' anything, ain't it? Money! Why, sure, smart guy. I un'erstan' that, all right."

"Then let's have your story," said Gail. He shoved a box of cigars across the desk. "Smoke?"

"Much obliged," grunted Bracco. He stripped off a pair of expensive fur-lined gloves, put them in his pocket, and lighted a cigar. "You want the truth, huh?"

"Yes," said Morton.

"Maybe I'm trustin' you with my life, see?"

"You can trust me or not, as you choose. There's no

danger to you, because there are no witnesses to our conversation. Besides which, no lawyer who expected to continue in practice would betray a client's confidence. But make up your own mind, Bracco."

The gangster removed the cigar from his mouth; wet his thick lips with his tongue.

"Well, it was like this," he said huskily. "One night a coupla weeks ago me and a bird named Sailor Red—he's one of my mob—we went in this cigar store about 9 p.m. to buy a package of snipes."

"Just to buy cigarettes, eh?"

"That's right, Mr. Morton. That's straight. We didn't have no other idea in our heads. Then when we got in the store, this bird Sailor Red he sees there ain't nobody in the place but the clerk. So, before I can dope his move, he pulls out his heatin' iron, and tells the clerk to hand over his cash. Well, the clerk—this fella Pendexter that got killed—he say he'll have to open the cash register. So he turns around to do it, and Red looks at me and winks. But right at that second I see the clerk reach for his pocket, so I flash my rod and let him have it in the back. It all happens in a coupla seconds."

"I see. What then?"

"Why, then we just walked outa the store and went home."

"And nobody saw you go out? Nobody heard the shot?"

Bracco shrugged his bulging shoulders.

"Plenty of people musta saw us—after we got outside. The street was crowded. But nobody paid no attention to us, and if anybody heard the shot they musta thought it was a car back-firin'. It was more'n an hour before a cop found the body behind the counter."

"The newspapers were right, then," said Gail evenly, without emotion. "It was cold-blooded murder. But, as

I've already pointed out, the lack of motive is in your favour. What about this accomplice of yours, this Sailor Red?"

Bracco's lips twisted in an evil grimace.

"He got his in a crap game, in some joint down by the railroad yards, a week ago."

"He's dead?"

"Yeah."

"Your handiwork, Bracco?"

"Naw. I don't even know who stuck the knife in his ribs. I wouldn't depend on no knife, myself."

"I believe you," said Morton, and added thoughtfully: "That simplifies matters. But why should the police suspect you of the Pendexter killing?"

The gangster's voice was a snarl: "I'm suspected of everything that goes screwy in this town. If a millionaire gets snatched or a kid gets lost walkin' home from school, some flat-foot from headquarters starts tailin' me. I'm sick of it, see? I can't stand no more of it——"

"You think the police have no real evidence against you?"

"Naw! But what's a cop care about evidence if he's got a piece of rubber hose in his hand? I'm out on bail now, but that won't keep the dicks from crackin' down on me, see? That's where you come in, Mr. Morton. You gotta get me outa town, or sumpin, till I gotta go to court. I can't stand no third-degree stuff——"

"Steady, Bracco," Gail said sharply. "Keep your shirt on. I can protect you from the police easily enough—if I decide to defend you at all."

Bracco half-rose from his chair.

"What?" he gasped. "What'd you say? You mean you ain't sure you'll take the case, after I come here——"

"It all depends——"

"—here and told you I killed a guy? Why, damn you——"

"Sit down," Gail said, so quietly that the other, after a moment, sank back into the chair. "Now. I've already told you that your confession is safe with me. Even if I wanted to betray you, no court would take my unsupported testimony as evidence."

"Then what's the idea, huh?"

"It's this," Gail said, and paused long enough to create in Bracco a tension of acute interest. "Before I decide finally whether or not to become your lawyer, I want to make absolutely sure of two things."

"What are they, smart guy?"

"I want to be sure of your nerve, and of your confidence in me."

"I got plenty of nerve," blustered Bracco.

The lawyer looked at him. "Yes; you've got the nerve to shoot a helpless man in the back. But have you got the kind of nerve you'll need on the witness stand—with a jury watching every move you make and every expression on your face? I can build a defence for you, Bracco. I can coach you in the lies you'll have to tell. But have you got the guts to follow where I lead you? Above all, will you—at all times and without reservation—really trust me? Trust me with your life?"

A muscle twitched in the gangster's dark face.

"Say! Would I be sittin' here in your office if I didn't trust you?"

"You've got to prove it to me," Gail said in his quiet voice. "I can't afford to take the slightest chance of losing my reputation in this community. It's my life as well as yours. You've got to prove your confidence in me."

"Prove it—how?"

Gail stretched a long arm across the desk.

"Give me your gun."

"I ain't—— How do you know——"

"Hand it over, Bracco."

The killer reached under his left armpit and drew out a thirty-eight-calibre revolver, which he placed in Gail Morton's hand.

"What's the game?" asked Bracco, scowling.

Gail didn't answer. Now he had the revolver out of sight under the desk. He was doing something with it. The mysterious movement of his hands under the desk sent muscular ripples up his arms and into his drooping shoulders. Finally he thrust his left hand into his overcoat pocket. With his right hand he pushed the cocked revolver back across the desk toward Bracco.

"I want you," he said, "to put the muzzle of this gun against your temple and pull the trigger."

"You want—*what*?"

"You heard me, didn't you?"

"Say, lissen, you! What's the gag? D'you think I'm nuts?"

"Listen yourself, Bracco. I've taken all the cartridges out of that gun. It's empty."

"How do I know it's empty?"

Gail thrust his huge torso half-way across the desk. His ugly Lincolnesque face gleamed like marble in the lamplight.

"You *don't* know, Bracco! That's just the point. You've got to take my word for it. Before I accept your case you've got to prove to me that you're willing to *trust me with your life*."

The gangster's swarthy skin turned swiftly to parchment; his black eyes stared wildly out of a mottled, repulsive, yellowish face.

"What the hell!" he shrieked faintly. "What the hell?"

"Do what I say!" roared Gail Morton in a voice whose thunders had shaken many a courtroom. "Do what I say—or walk out of this office straight to the electric chair!"

Bracco made a sound—an inarticulate animal sound, deep in his throat. Then, as if hypnotised, he slowly raised the revolver (it seemed a great weight in his hand) and placed the muzzle against his right temple. His eyes grew enormous as they stared into Gail's.

"O.K., smart guy! I'm trustin' you, see? I'm trustin' y——"

The shot shattered with crazy echoes the silence of the room. Bracco's body leaped convulsively off the chair, struck the floor with a soft crashing sound, and lay still.

Gail Morton acted quickly then. In an instant he was bending over the gangster's crumpled form. Bracco was dead. Picking up the revolver that lay on the floor near by, Gail took from his pocket the five cartridges that he had removed from it and, breaking the gun, replaced them in the chamber. The empty shell of the sixth cartridge, which he had *not* removed, remained where it was.

Carefully replacing the revolver on the floor, near the dead man's outstretched hand, Gail rose and went to the clothes closet near the fireplace. He took off his hat and overcoat and hung them in the closet. He removed his yellow pigskin gloves and stuffed them into his overcoat.

He strode back to his desk and telephoned police headquarters. Then he sat down, lighted a cigar, and waited.

In a remarkably short time two patrolmen, a coroner's assistant, and a detective sergeant arrived at his office. Gail met them at the door. They all knew lawyer Morton.

"Evenin', sir," said the sergeant. "What's happened?"

Gail pointed to the corpse on his carpet. He said quickly: "That is—or was—Johnny Bracco, sergeant."

"Bracco! You mean Bracco the gangster?"

"Yes. He came here to-night to try to engage me as his attorney. He confessed to the Pendexter killing and——"

"Johnny confessed he done the Pendexter job?"

"Yes. He wanted me to defend him. He felt that he was in grave danger."

"He was right," said the police officer grimly. "But—go on, Mr. Morton. What's the pay-off on this story?"

"It's very simple, sergeant. Bracco was desperate—frightened out of his wits and yellow to the backbone. When I refused to have anything to do with the case, he went all to pieces.

"I ordered him to leave my office. Suddenly he pulled out his gun and shot himself. Temporary insanity, I suppose."

"That tough gorilla croaked himself?"

"Yes."

"Well, I'll be a son of a gun," said the sergeant softly. He looked at Gail Morton. "Knowing Johnny, it's a wonder he didn't croak *you*."

Gail smiled and shook his head.

"He lacked the nerve, sergeant. You see, I didn't turn my back to him. I kept looking him straight in the eye."

The sergeant nodded understandingly.

"Yeah," he said; and added with dispassionate final judgment: "The rat!"

Once more alone in his office, Gail Morton went to his desk and took from its top drawer the newspaper clipping that he had concealed there before Bracco came in. He walked to the fireplace; stood looking down at the picture of the woman whose faded prettiness still aroused repercussions of beauty in his brain.

Mechanically he murmured to himself the bleak words printed above it: "*Mrs. George Pendexter, whose Husband was Killed—*"

Gail Morton's ugly face took on a light other than that from the glowing grate.

"You'd have done better to have married me, my dear," he said aloud. "But you loved Pendexter, and that was that.



At least I've avenged his death this night. A small service, but eminently satisfactory. Adroit, too. Very adroit, if I may say so. Good-bye, my only dear, and may the Lord of all our twisted fates be kind to you."

He threw the clipping into the fire.

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